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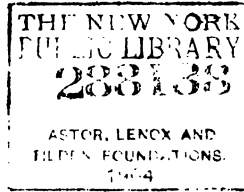
JANET H. HADERMANN,

AUTHOR OF "AGAINST THE WORLD," "DEAD MEN'S SHOES," "FORGIVEN
AT LAST," ETC.

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HEAVY YOKES.

CHAPTER I.

A WORLDLING DIES.

"And thus with greater cause
Would we respect the laws,
Which *should* be revered to be obeyed,
It isn't best to see them made."

"Has she come?"

"They have come, sir."

What was there in the substitution of a plural for a singular pronoun, which should so have disturbed the sick man? His eyes shot angry flames as they rested reproachfully upon the gigantic form and child-like countenance of the creature who had served him with the faithfulness of a dog through all the darkest passages of his life.

"They. Who, Danbury?"

"Father Richards, sir, the Judge's lady, the reverend and his lady—"

"You meant well, Danbury, but you have been officious, displeasingly so. Is there no one else below?"

"I was going on to say, Colonel, a strange lady, sir, that nobody seems to know."

"Show her up."

"Sir!"

"Show the strange lady up alone, Sergeant."

The old army title revived military discipline. It was for the Sergeant to obey and not question. He gave a military salute and disappeared to do his superior's bidding, suppressing, with soldierly resolution, even the inclination to marvel at the strangeness of that bidding.

Sergeant Danbury knew no better watchword than obedience.

Unquestioning obedience had been the practice of his life, ever since he had entered service under the sick man, up stairs, as drummer-boy, to the present

moment—when he was going into the presence of the aristocracy of the Staunton connection, to tell them that they were not wanted, but that the handsome unknown was. This long discipline in obedience made it easy for him to open the waiting-room door, and after an apologetic bow to the relatives of the master, to announce, clearly and distinctly, as if calling the roll: "Colonel Staunton will see the strange lady first."

Evincing no more emotion than if she had been bidden to break her fast, the strange lady rose up to follow him into the sick man's presence.

* * * * *

Before Sergeant Danbury's advent, weariness of the monotony of waiting, had been the prevailing facial expression of the family group; after his exit, lively and indignant surprise, more or less openly expressed, took possession of the family bosom. Father Richards, whose classic head, with its crown of snow, not cropped after the priestly style, had been bent in absorbed attention over "Balme's European Civilization; Protestantism and Catholicity Compared," raised his thoughtful blue eyes toward the retreating figures for a brief second, then dropped them again to the ponderous tome before him. But had you watched him closely, you would have marvelled at the length of time which it took such a finished scholar to travel over one little page. Father Richards plainly had his own thoughts about the strange proceeding on the part of the dying worldling, but "William had always been odd," and Father Richards's thoughts about this present and probably final exhibition of his oddness were as much his own private property as the black gown which hid the manly proportions of his really fine form.

Sergeant Danbury's summons to the

strange lady were not so placidly received by some other members of the company the Rev. Mr. St. John Ames, for instance, who was standing in front of the glass doors of the book-case, glaring at the stately array of good books behind them.

His eyes followed the retreating forms of the old soldier and the strange lady, and as the door closed upon them he turned suddenly from the consideration of ancient authors to inquire of the Rev. Mrs. St. John Ames, a faded little woman with faded eyes and a faded spirit, in that quick, harsh voice, that never failed of effect, when hurled from the pulpit like a stone from a sling, straight upon the nodding heads of drowsy sinners:

"Maria, what does that mean?"

This query was a very familiar sound in the meek woman's ears, being delivered, as it was on the present occasion, with a fierce accentuation which seemed to hold her personally responsible for the eccentricities of other folks. The sick man's anomalous proceedings, collecting all his nearest of kin under his roof (for how should they know that they owed their summons to the affectionate officiousness of Sergeant Danbury alone), and then sending for this handsome stranger to interview her privately, while they, the dignified and titled ones of the earth, must bide their time like a parcel of office-seekers in the ante-room of a political magnate, was altogether unbearable and unaccountable, and if Maria did not know what it meant, (raised up with him, too, her born brother), she must be a poor sort of a woman indeed.

As usual, rather than acknowledge herself a poor sort of woman, by saying so, and truthfully that she could not divine what it meant, Mrs. St. John resorted upon a guess—at best a risky narrative, on this occasion an unsuccessful one:

"Maybe this beautiful lady is nearest kin to poor baby's mother, dear."

A pair of gold-rimmed batteries was brought to bear upon the feeble guesser from the arm-chair which supported the richly robed person of the "Judge's lady," (own born sister to the faded supplement), a lady of such dignity and importance and aggressiveness that it was really hard to believe that the two sprang from the same parent stock. The purple and fine linen in which the Judge's lady

was clothed were not in greater contrast with the reverend sister's rusty black, than was the meek self-abnegation of the one with the proud self-assertion of the other.

"Baby's poor mother, Maria, my dear, was a French woman named Tricou, if you will only try to remember, sometimes. Who she was or where William picked her up, Heaven only knows, and possibly it is well for the family peace of mind that we know no more than we do of her. This stranger, who is no more French than you or I, can hardly be of nearer kin in this house than those whom William has seen fit to insult for her sake. What it may mean," continued the Judge's lady in tones of authority, tapping the arms of her chair with her gold-rimmed glasses, and looking with contemptuous pity upon her meek sister, as if she was reluctantly compelled to endorse the general sentiment which pronounced her but a poor sort of a woman, "it is worse than idle for us to conjecture. William Staunton was always an unaccountable man. He has been doing things in his strange way ever since he could talk, and it seems as if he could not make up his mind even to die in a commonplace manner. Sooner or later, I feel satisfied that some sort of explanation will be vouchsafed us, of this proceeding, which strikes us all, not excepting Richards there, demure as he looks in his priestly gown and pious abstraction, as being very peculiar to say the least of it. In the meantime, my dear kinsfolk, tranquillize your minds. I shall wait with philosophic patience, the denouement, which is sure to come in some more or less satisfactory form," With which peroration Mrs. Judge Weyland settled herself into a more luxurious position, patted her glossy braids as if in self-commendation for such wise utterances, with a plump, white hand, upon which glittered diamonds, one of which would have made a year's income for her less fortunate sister, and indulged in one of those well-bred yawns which, translated, means, "you bore me." For want of something better to do, they all took the Judge's lady's advice and waited for the denouement,

* * * * *

"Leave the child here, and Miss Morgan will call you when you are wanted, nurse."

The voice which uttered these words of dismissal was so strong and rich that it was hard to associate it with physical decay, much less imminent dissolution.

For the first time, since entering the house, signs of emotion disturbed the statuesque calm of Miss Morgan's handsome face. The pale cheeks grew a shade whiter. Her full red lips parted with a sudden tremulous motion, and, as she laid her hand in greeting within the attenuated one William Staunton stretched out with eager joy, a perceptible quiver ran through her stately form, nor was her voice quite free from emotion, as she bent over the prostrate form of the sick man with the simple greeting:

"I am come, William; what can I do for you?"

Whatever these two had been to each other in the long ago, the tie must have been strong, and its severance severe. For no one could look upon the strongly-marked features of the dying man, and doubt that his had been a nature of vigorous growth, and sturdy independence, nor could they trace the lines of quiet endurance about the curves of the lady's beautiful mouth, and think that they belonged to an ordinary woman. These two strong natures had acted somehow upon each other in days by-gone, and the deep look of tenderness which shone in the eyes already growing dim with the shadow of the coming event showed that in one of those souls, if not in both, the memory of those days by-gone was strong and fresh.

"This is kind of you, Eleanor, so kind. I had no right to ask as much."

With a successful effort for self-recovery, the stately lady, bending over him for awhile in soft, womanly sympathy, laid the long white hand she had been holding in her own back upon the bed; then seating herself in the chair which the old Sergeant had politely placed before leaving the room, she drew toward her the little seven-year-old girl who stood gazing at the strange lady with wonder-stretched eyes, and, gently lifting her upon her lap, she passed her slender fingers caressingly through the child's thick hair, thus mutely admonishing the dying man that there and there alone should his last thoughts cluster.

She was understood. "Poor little Delphine. It is for her sake, dear

Eleanor, that I have dared so much as to send for you."

"I expected as much," the commonplace answer, given in a quietly, lady-like voice, seemed to place an impassible barrier between them individually. Her words meant, "Your child is the safe neutral ground upon which we meet."

"You will take charge of her for me?" The voice was as tenderly pleading as a woman's.

"I! She has relatives much better fitted for the task in every way."

Something wonderfully like a sneer, curled William Staunton's lips:—who? that woman of the world Mrs. Weyland, or that poor washed-out saint, Mrs. St. John Ames?"

"Is not Father Richards her uncle?"

"Eleanor! A priest! A convent! What has my baby done to deserve such a fate?"

A smile of infinite tenderness played round the lady's lips as she drew the little one closer to her.

"I was but half in earnest when I mentioned that name. But her aunt's; they can give her advantages which I cannot, I am poor, William."

"My child is rich, Eleanor."

A look of undisguised surprise came into Miss Morgan's face.

"You surprise me very much. I gathered from the conversation below that you had returned from France impoverished and that this house and the grounds attached were all that stood between your little girl and absolute poverty."

"I have purposely given that impression, I do not wish that Delphine herself should know until the day of her marriage that she is an heiress."

"Why is this? And how is it to be accomplished?"

"Why! I will tell you, Eleanor. Can you not imagine that the bitterness of death lies in the thought that my child would be exposed to the lures and wiles of every accursed whiskerando whose pocket needs replenishing? How is it to be accomplished? Very easily. All of her property is in France. A friend of mine over there, staunch and true beyond the many, is the sole trustee of Delphine's moneyed interests. I arranged all that before coming home to die. In this country, to you and to one other only, that other, my faithful Danbury,

will the knowledge of her heiressship be imparted. My object in sending for you before admitting my family, is to give you the papers relative to this business, as also the address of my trustee."

"Surely, William, one of your sisters, both of whom have husbands to assist them in this responsible matter, are fitter objects of trust than I."

"Stop, Eleanor! Rather than see my girl grow up under the influence, or become the imitator of either of her two insane aunts, I would place her under Richards's priestly protection; and rather than do that I would pray to God to let me take my forlorn little one in my arms out into the great unknown, towards which I am travelling."

"But once in my life, have I ever seen a woman upon whom I would model my daughter. That woman is Eleanor Morgan. I ask her to take my little child, to make her like herself, and then the world may tempt her in vain. Panoply her with your own dignity, purity and virtue, and she will be as safe, motherless and fatherless, as though guarded by armed legions."

"Do you know, William, that good people (that is people who when they pray thank God that they are not as others are) would tell you I am not fit to raise your daughter. When you first began to speak, I was tempted to refuse the grave charge you are imposing upon me. I trembled at the responsibility. But I believe, now, I thank you for giving me this little child-soul to experiment upon. This pure white lily, so lately come fresh from the celestial gardens, I would rear into a stately plant and have it go back to the hands of the great gardener as white and as pure as when he entrusted it to you. I will try to have her believe, with me, that there is no sect in Heaven. I will teach her the litany of moral truth and I will inculcate the creed of universal charity. I will teach her that the Father sent his only Son to die for *all mankind*; I will make a woman of her; I will teach her to scorn a lie as she would a theft, to shun vice as she would the leprosy. I will try to make her strong and brave, the two most necessary virtues of her sex."

"Why!"

"She will need them in the hour of suffering."

"But why need she suffer, Eleanor? Beautiful, young, wealthy—"

"And a woman."

"Eleanor—" It came like a wail from out the past.

"Stop, William; do not give a personal application to my broad assertion. My own days of suffering are so far away in the past, and so entirely forgiven, that it would be the most mawkish sentimentality to bring them forward upon this solemn occasion. There was no reproach lying perdu in my remark." The smile which accompanied her words was so calmly serene that it could only have been reflected from a soul at peace with itself and God, a peace born of the consciousness that:—

"It is not all of life to live—
Nor all of death to die."

A silence painful in its intenseness followed upon her words. Then Eleanor spoke again in lighter tones:

"Where is the friend, William, who is to share with me the precious charge you are leaving?"

"Touch that bell three times, please. He will come."

Almost before the sound had ceased Sergeant Danbury stood within the room.

"Danbury, you will please bring from my walnut desk the brass-nailed box which I told you, in case of my sudden death, was to be placed in bank, until you found the lady to whom the letter in your possession was addressed. This is the lady; so your share of the responsibility is lessened. Bring the box and place it in her hands."

The box soon rested upon Eleanor's lap, and upon one of the shining brass nails, which studded the top, there glistened a tear, large, clear and pellucid, for which the old soldier need not have hung his head in shame. Tenderly the lady wiped the shining tribute away with a soft bit of cambric and tenderly she glanced up at the war-beaten visage of the faithful old Sergeant as he stood by the head of the bed, withdrawn from the range of the master's vision.

"Mr. Danbury and I will be good friends and collaborators in Delphine's service, William."

"God bless you both! Sergeant."

"Here, sir."

"To the front, man, where I can look you in the face."

With head bowed down, the old soldier obeyed.

"What, tears in a soldier's eyes?" The wistful gratitude of the voice mollified the gentle mockery of the words.

"I am not going just yet, Danbury. A week—maybe a month—may tell the tale of my ill-spent days. But I do not want to wait until reason deserts her throne to say what ought to be said. Therefore, listen to me now. When I am gone—head up, man—you will take the little lady, as you call her, with all her moveable effects to this lady's address in Wickam. You will be my girl's friend as you have been mine, to the end of your honest life. I believe in you, Sergeant, with all the power of belief left in my soul. I believe that you will watch over my child's interests as you would your own. This house I wish to be kept in habitable order always. I want the child to feel that there is one spot on earth which she can call home, and which will be inalienable. Return here after having carried the little one to Miss Morgan, and you and your worthy old mother, have here a home for life. All I ask is that you will serve my daughter as you have served me. And the God of the orphan will smile upon you." He held out his emaciated hand to the old soldier. It was bedewed with honest tears when he withdrew it.

"Please show my family up, Danbury."

There was a slight rustling of silk and a sanctified odor of priest and clergyman as the family group settled itself about the bed of death.

Very courteously the master of the house received them, submitting to be kissed by the two sisters from whom he had been separated for many long years, exchanging hand-pressure only with his priestly brother and clerical brother-in-law.

Then, with that suavity of manner for which in health he had been so remarkable, he passed into an animated discussion of the private and separate interests of each one present, with an earnestness that implied that there was no other subject of interest common to them all.

With Richards the infallibility dogma was gracefully handled—with the Rev. St. John Ames ritualism was discussed. The Judge's lady was solicited to tell him all about the cadet around whom her maternal affections centred, and poor Mrs. St. John was sympathized tenderly with upon the loss of her

"angel Willie;" with his waning powers he grappled them all, and kept them so skilfully, and yet so fixedly upon the safe ground of their own personal concerns, that when the dying day warned them to depart, not one in all that brave crowd had ventured to touch upon his personal concerns.

"We will see you again, brother" said Mrs. Ames, bending over him for a farewell kiss.

"Hardly, Maria, as I will not trouble you to come this distance soon again. It is not likely I shall live very many more days."

"Then, William, possibly it would be a comfort to have me remain with you." It was Father Richards who spoke.

"Thanks, Richards. No, it would be no comfort."

"But the child?" ventured the Judge's lady.

"Is provided for. This lady," indicating Miss Morgan, "whom I know to be thoroughly competent, has undertaken to educate Delphine under her own roof."

"And is there nothing you will allow your family to do for you, William?" and the gray clergyman stepped to the front. "May I not express a hope that you will allow me before leaving to read for your benefit a portion of our beautiful service which—"

"Thanks, reverend brother, but as I have lived so let me die. I am not afraid to die. Your Psalmist says: 'He that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbor, and hath not slandered his neighbor—he that swear-eth unto his neighbor, and disappoint-eth him not, though it were to his own hindrance; he that hath not given his money upon usury, nor taken reward against the innocent—whoso doeth these things shall never fall;' on the honor of a gentleman I am guiltless of all these misdemeanors; therefore, if your Bible is sufficient guaranty for my salvation, I can dispense with your kindly proffered services, my dear kinsfolk. But why are you all bidding me good-bye. Surely you do not think of returning home to-night? Let me press you to remain."

But the train which was to convey them to their several destinations was available only once in twenty-four hours, and as they were to be allowed to do nothing for this dying sinner, why should they linger?

A few more faint efforts the professors made to be allowed to indoctrinate the scoffer. Their advances were met and parried with polished steel foils.

They took the return train that night.

"It is too terrible," sobbed poor Mrs. St. John; "our own born brother, too."

"He has lived in France until he is saturated with the spirit of irreligion. He was always inclined toward free-thinking."

"I shall cause masses for a dying soul to be read," said Father Richard.

"Poor William, he is terrible, no doubt. But what an exquisite gentleman. He fascinates one even while giving utterance to his most monstrous views. I only hope my Paul will grow up to be half the polished gentleman he is. After all, it's very comfortable not to have to worry over that child. If ever I saw a mother's vixenish disposition shine out of a young child's eyes, it does in Delphine's."

"Oh! Catherine, when I go back to the time when dear William and you and I used to be such happy little children under the same roof-tree, this all sounds so terrible and heartless and cold."

"Yes, but my dear Maria, we're not three happy little children under the same roof-tree now, and when people don't see each other for fifteen or sixteen years it is utterly impossible to pick up the old feeling just where we left off."

"Ladies," spoke Eleanor Morgan bravely from her unobserved position, "it would be cowardly of me longer to keep silence. You spoke of having been estranged from your brother for many years; that accounts in part for your sad undervaluation of his truly noble character. A free-thinker he was and is—but the thoughts which have come to him in their freedom have been noble and generous thoughts, bearing precious fruits of charity which would have brightened the record of many a professor. I think if I were at liberty to tell you all I have known and heard about this brother of yours (who was the bosom friend of a very dear brother of my own), you would revise your recent comments upon him, and would dare to hope that he will be received into the realms of peace, by Him who came to save sinners, of which he is not chief. Pardon what must sound very presumptuous in your ears, but I think no greater proof of

moral cowardice can be given than for me to defend the absent who are so helpless in their ignorance of attack." Bowing slightly, and allowing her calm gray eyes to rest upon them momentarily with a shade of reproach darkening them, she withdrew once more into her dignified reserve.

How utterly unconscious were they that, while these pitying words of defence were being spoken, Azrael had softly descended, and bidden the corruptible to put on incorruption, guiding the immortality of William Staunton to the awful presence where he was answer for the deeds done by the mortal. The unusual excitement of the day had only precipitated the fast-coming final

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPENDING CALAMITY.

"When fierce, conflicting passions urge
The breast where love is wont to glow,
What mind can stem the stormy surge
Which rolls the tide of human woe?"

—Byron.

"Dear Madam—It is with feelings too big for utterance, that I write this to let you know that my beloved Colonel is no more and that I will start for your city this day weak, with the poor little Lady which this sad stroke has left alone in this wicked vale of tears.

Respectfully your humble and obedient servant,
ALEXANDER DANBURY.

It was this note of the old Sergeant's, truer in sentiment than in orthography, which had brought the inmates of Miss Morgan's home in Wickam into family conclave.

It was located in the prettiest and quietest portion of the county town of Wickam, in the lawyer's quarter, as it was called, in contradistinction to the upper and noisier commercial region. The tiny garden which beautified the front premises was the labor of love of hands unskilled but tasteful. The Morgans, being people of limited means, were very insignificant in the eyes of the community, so much so that although the Judge's lady lived in her grand old house just a mile out of Wickam, and the Rev. St. John Ames was pastor of the Episcopal Church right in the town of Wickam, they met for the first time at William Staunton's death-bed. Moreover, as the Morgans were perfectly

in the matter of church and went now to one and then, they were looked upon as stray sheep belonging to no flock and hence were left to shepherd themselves. Again, they were new to the aristocratic neighborhood, and in the social, as well as the political arena, one must needs have been a naturalized citizen and a resident for many months or years before one could expect recognition. The general atmosphere of the place had been changed by the Morgans, and, as the one male member of the little family could here satisfactorily continue his studies, and launch into his chosen profession with fair hopes of success, the women folk were content to pass their time, the more content in that they were sufficient unto their own peaceful enjoyment of life.

There was no undue or unnecessary reticence between the two sisters and the brother who formed that little family circle. Therefore, immediately upon her return, Miss Morgan had given an explicit account of her summons to the death-bed of the man who was known to the other two only as the chosen friend of their own elder brother, now dead. She had told them of the strange bequest of the child to her care. Nor had the admission of a small and probably spoilt child into their quiet little circle been looked upon as the highest earthly good by one at least of the two who had no reasons for feeling any more interest in William Staunton's child than in any other stranger's. Still it had heretofore been discussed as something vaguely in the future. Something which might be interfered with. The sluggish affection of the family might finally be aroused to the pitch of demanding possession of the little one. Mr. Maxwell Morgan, whose studious serenity was threatened, hoped it might. Eleanor had promised. The fulfilment of her promise would be the introduction of a disturbing element, fatal to the quietude so precious to the young lawyer. He it was who brought home the old sergeant's letter.

Eleanor read it, and then looking across at Max, who was arranging his reading matter for the evening with such an air of placid comfort, she said in slightly apologetic tones:

"It is coming, Max."

"What is coming?" The question was genuine, for in the absorption of his legal studies, which were being pursued with the most ardent ambition, Max had temporarily lost sight of the threatened invasion, which he had called an impending calamity.

"The impending calamity."

"The father is dead, then?"

"He is." A slight pause, just long enough for a woman's soul to breathe "Requiescat in pace" over the dead lover of her dead youth. Then the old Sergeant's letter was read aloud.

"Poor little girl, so young and so lonely." It was Max who broke the silence. His tender heart had triumphed over his selfish fears. But for others' sake he still withheld a cordial endorsement of Eleanor's promise.

"You have taken a grave responsibility upon yourself, my dear Eleanor."

"I recognize it in its gravest aspect, Max, but I could not refuse any more than you could, had you been pleaded to by a dying father as I was."

"Will not so young a child absorb every moment of your time?"

"Not unless I manage very poorly. She is no infant; on the contrary, a remarkably bright child past seven years."

"The noisiest of ages."

"She would not be a child and noiseless."

"But how will our precious invalid stand this invasion of her peaceful quiet?"

"Oh! Max, don't mention me. I look forward to the coming of this poor little orphan with the feverish eagerness I used to bestow upon every promised toy. I thank dear Eleanor for her promise. This little Delphine will prattle to me when you are away and Eleanor busy. She shall learn her letters upon this poor useless lap. I don't think, Max dear, it will do any of us harm to have the bright young thing here; we are very happy as it is, but we might be merrier, might we not?"

As Max looked into the sweet face of his younger sister (whose sad fate it had been to be dashed from the buoyant happiness of high spirited girlhood into the pitiful imprisonment of a cripple's life), and saw how that countenance, so pathetic, usually, in its expression of patient endurance, was lighted up with pleased anticipation, his last objection vanished into thin air.

Evelyn, this youngest member of the family was also its idol. Max strode across to her arm-chair, and, taking the bloodless little hands in his warm clasp, he bowed his tall head until its crown of curling brown hair rested upon Evelyn's shining braids: a kiss as soft and gentle as a woman's lips could have given, he pressed upon her forehead: "So let it be, darling sister. If this little orphan serves to brighten one moment of this dear life, I too will thank Eleanor for her promise."

A few more days of expectation, and then one evening, just as Eleanor had lighted the sitting-room lamp and was glancing around to see if everything was just as comfortable as it could be, for it was raining and Max was late, she heard a heavy measured tread upon the front gallery followed, by a knock, and stepping quickly to open the door, she found there the old Sergeant, holding in his strong arms the impending calamity. The soft little cheek, flushed with crying, lay confidently upon the shaggy coat which covered his honest heart, and from between the half-parted lips the breath came gently and regularly. She was sleeping the sound sleep of tired childhood.

Sergeant Danbury had no hand at his own disposal, so, with an apology to the lady for not removing his cap, he walked behind her with his precious burden, trying very hard to walk lightly and noiselessly, with such success as a kind-hearted elephant might have achieved under like circumstances.

"Bless its poor little broken heart," he whispered as he laid baby and bundle on the sofa by Miss Morgan's direction; "it went asleep in the carriage after crying its soul away, and I've walked like egg-shells was under my feet, so I might hand her over and be gone before she wakes up to break my heart too with her big mournful eyes and her cry for him that's gone. And now, Ma'am, with the delivery of this letter (he was writing it when the end came) I believe I've done the full bidding of my beloved Colonel. And Oh! dear lady, will you speak a kind word once in a while to the little lady about the old Sergeant! I would think it so kind of you if you'll just not let her forget old 'Dan,' as she calls me, and bless the sweet lips that says it, say I. You'll know always where to find me, ma'am,

at the old place. And maybe times, Miss Morgan, when the are blooming, or the strawberries are blooming, you'd not mind coming out to the old place for a day and, maybe, with little lady, and let her run like of old. You will gladden twice if ever you'd do it. That's mine the old mother's. At any rate we things trim and bright, hoping if not just exactly expecting come to us."

"Indeed, my good Sergeant, your little lady shall not forget you. We will talk about you to her. And you will come to see her whenever you choose to come to Wickam. And again, I thank you for your invitation for us to come out to the old place. We will all come. And you will make my dear sister there happy with your violets and strawberries."

It cheered the honest heart to think his simple invitation was to be productive of happiness to these good friends of his baby idol, and he brightened up as Eleanor had intended he should.

Miss Morgan pressed him to stay until tea was ready, but his horror of having to bid Delphine good-bye, or of hearing again the childish voice raised in mourning for the dead, was too great. Stooping over the sofa, he took up one little tiny hand, and pressing it to his rough beard and upon his forehead, he dropped it suddenly, gulped down a rising sob, and shaking hands hastily with the two ladies, strode toward the front door and out into the rainy night. It clanged to heavily behind him and awoke the sleeping child.

A bound and one shrill scream for "Dan," and in the centre of the room, her eyes stretched wide with terror, stood the poor little orphan, in the strange house, with strange eyes gazing pityingly upon her.

"How beautiful she is," burst involuntarily from Evelyn's lips, who could do nothing but sit still while Eleanor hastened toward the poor little stranger to take her within the loving shelter of her arms.

And very beautiful the child certainly did look.

Her eyes, lovely, big brown eyes, were shining through the fast falling tears which gemmed her long curling lashes. Her cheeks and lips were crimsoned with excitement, and during her sleep,

hair, which had been braided in two
re plaits, had come loose from its
as and hung about the baby face
at heavy masses.

mor held out her arms encourag-
me, Delphine, come sit in my
ou are going to be my little girl

infantile form was drawn up to its
height, and the tiny boot stamped
rage as with flashing eyes she
l upon Eleanor:

a not. I'm not. I'm not. I'm
little girl. Dan said papa was
away for a little while, and I might
him. Dan don't tell stories. I
to go to papa. I want Dan; oh!
where is you!" and the wail which
ed upon the stormy gust pressed
of compassion from her two loving
and auditors.

Delphine, don't you know poor little
g, that I am the lady who held you
lap when she went to see your pa-
And don't you remember papa
you that I would be good to you
ve you?" She approached the
figure once more. Still retreating
amping, another storm-gust burst
them. She "didn't want anybody
e her and be good to her, but papa
an. What had they done with Dan?
anted Dan! Dan! Dan!"

Morgan was almost at her wits'
s she advanced the little one re-
d; her exhortations were unavail-
The child she feared would make
f sick. Just then the door opened
Max, astonished, stood upon the
old. At a glance he comprehended
situation. Eleanor in pleading
le and with pitying face—the child
tly retreating, standing at bay in
lespair. She had retreated almost
door, stooping quickly before she
rdly aware that the enemy had
enforced; Max bore her captive
l the fire in his strong arms. Her
risoned hands revenged this indig-
one to her small person. Into his
rown locks they twined themselves
sly. They rested unlovingly upon
ehead, nose and cheeks in rapid
sion, taking a final grip upon his
ache, which made her captor wince
ain.

at a vixen it is," he said, seating
f with his prize still upon his lap,
ishing his disordered hair from off

his eyes, before proceeding to moral
suasion.

Then tightening his hold around the
little form until kicking and pummelling
were rendered physical impossibilities,
Max looked straight into the flashing
eyes with tender pity shining in his own.

"Delphine!"

Delphine did not answer, but the lids
drooped over the flashing eyes, and the
tiny mouth quivered pitifully. "Does
Delphine want to know how she can get
to see papa again, and all about Dan?"

Delphine did want to know all there
was to know about those two most dear
to her baby heart, and she intimated her
desire between convulsive sobs. "And
she will be very quiet and sit in Miss
Morgan's lap while she tells her all she
wants to know?"

"Yes."

Then Max gave her to Eleanor saying,
"Take her. The task is beyond me."
and he passed out of the room. Com-
ing back half an hour later he found
Delphine sitting quietly where he had
left her. Eleanor had talked at length,
gravely and tenderly. Had the baby
mind taken it all in? He doubted it;
for suddenly clasping her small hands
she exclaimed rapturously:

"I know, I know, Dan is gone for papa
and they'll come back to Delphine
t'morrow."

"Time can do what you cannot, sister;
let patience have its perfect work," said
Max, with a smile of pity for baby's de-
lusion and Eleanor's wasted eloquence.

CHAPTER III.

ELEANOR SUSPECTS.

"The first sigh of love is the last of wisdom."—*La Bruyère*.

A moot question! Whether—is it
pleasanter to watch the progress of a
flower seed which our own hand has
hidden away in the germinative soil—
swell, sprout, shoot heavenward, take
on its first tender foliage, finally burst-
ing into flowery magnificence, or, to
hide that seed away in the sheltering
bosom of mother earth, giving it no heed
until nature has worked the wondrous
miracle of its perfection and it bursts
upon us in the plenitude of fragrant
beauty, intoxicating the senses and mak-
ing glad the eye?

A relevant question! Whether—ah

I, after the fashion of the long ago, ask my readers to "imagine an interval of seven uneventful years;" or else, beg them to watch with me the slow unfolding of my small heroine from the tender floweret which Sergeant Danbury carried so gently in his strong arms to place safe within Eleanor Morgan's fostering care, there to be reared and cultured into the "stately plant" of her promise.

In the case of the admirable Crichton, Master of Arts, we are told, at the tender age of fourteen it is more than probable that reflection seized the helm before he was well out of long clothes. But with my heroine, Miss Delphine Staunton, a creature of latter-day mediocrity, I am sure that sensation was still in the ascendant when she reached her fourteenth birthday, which found her mistress of no art, save that of winning hearts.

Long before that day had rolled around, Delphine had come to be not only with, but of the Morgans. Eleanor (who found her daily increasing delight in inscribing pure, good principles of living upon the fresh tablets of a girlish soul), wondered how she could ever have dreaded to undertake the charge, so docile was the child; Evelyn, whose share in the formation of a true woman out of this parentless child was not slight, wondered how she had ever dragged through the dull, lonely mornings without her sunbeam, as she loved to call the child. Max, arrived at the dignity of a growing reputation, and a long silky beard, followed with eyes full of satisfaction. The buoyant figure of the pretty creature who was always so glad to offer some tender little attention to "poor dear tired old Max," as soon as he reached home, wondered how he could ever have been such a brute as to call her a "calamity."

To the child herself those seven years meant nothing more than a glad succession of sunshine and kindness, and beauty and fragrance, during which time she grew in conscious stature and conscious beauty, with a heart brimful of ardent, trustful affection for the good God above—for "Precious Eleanor," "Angel Evelyn," "Dearest old Max," and "Her Dan"—the old Sergeant standing very much in the position of a huge Newfoundland pet-dog in his little *flections*.

Are there not in the picture-gallery of every one's memory photographs of certain scenes or occurrences, trivial and perhaps inconsequent in themselves, which retain through many a changing year? Yes, even until memory deserts her throne, the vivid coloring of their inception, while others, more recent and perhaps more fateful, succumbing to the mellowing touch of time, grow pale and paler, dim and dimmer, until nothing remains to tell the tale of their happening, except, maybe, a heart-scar or a tear-stain.

When the soft brown hair which was the glory of Eleanor Morgan's prime, lay in waves of silver on her calmly handsome brow, she could never sit by an open window in the soft May time, smelling the violets and the hyacinths, and listening to the dull, lazy drone of the beetle, without seeing before her a trim little garden, a green iron-chair under a honey-suckle vine occupied by the slender, graceful figure of Delphine Staunton, a huge straw garden hat shading her pretty face, while her hands (sadly sun-browned from the amount of unskilled labor she persisted in expending upon Max's flower-beds) made believe to be busily occupied making seed bags for the coming time of gathering in the flowery harvest. Max's position in the picture was that of a self-absorbed florist, with no eyes nor thought for the bright, soul-gifted flower under the honey-suckle vine, so deep was his interest in the gaudy tulip over which he was bending, impatiently eager for the moment when it would burst into variegated splendor in reward for his gentle culture and patient waiting.

There was nothing in the picture which Eleanor could possibly fix upon as having any bearing upon what had gone before, or what was to come after. It simply pointed an era. It was the dawn of a great surprise; the night-fall of a happy, care-free time.

"Max," Delphine was saying, as she sat in the garden-chair on that soft May morning, "don't you think I am a very brave woman?"

Still bending with lover-like solicitude over his slow-coming tulip, Max answered without taking the trouble to look into the bright face under the big garden-hat:

"You have appropriated an imposing adjective and a proud substantive. Miss

Staunton, I should like to have you make good your claim."

"Why, don't you think it's just as brave as can be for me to defy public opinion by being on such good terms with a carpenter and a gardener?"

"The two trades most honored by time and precedent. Surely the carpenter's trade ought to be held in venerated esteem by all good Christians, for the gentle mother of the Christ whose name they boast did not disdain to consort with a carpenter, and as for the antique respectability of the gardener, I need only refer you to our great progenitor, Adam."

"Max, what sort of spade and wheel do you suppose were in use when 'Adam dug and Eve span?' Come, now, it's your turn to say your catechism. Say it like a good boy."

"Please ma'm, that isn't in my book."

"Don't know it?" rising inflection of surprise.

"Don't know it!" rising inflection of acknowledgment.

"Is it possible I have found something that my encyclopædia cannot explain?"

"Very many things there are, sadly many, little girl, that your encyclopædia, as you foolishly call me, cannot explain. After all, my knowledge, like your bravery, in fact like almost any attribute we bungling mortals boast of possessing, is but comparative."

"I am consoled for synonyms," said Delphine, folding her small hands over the work in her lap and heaving a sigh of supreme satisfaction. Then she sent her restless eyes on a tour of inspection down the road. They informed her of the approach of a dashing equipage. In a voice of tragic warning she called out to Max, who, having exchanged his spade for a hatchet, was dealing sonorous blows upon a broken fence-panel a little distance off:

"Max!"

"Miss Staunton!"

"Hide your hatchet."

"Wherefore? I am no more ashamed of my hatchet than was the immortal George himself. Beside, there are no cherry trees in jeopardy."

"But your reputation is."

"From what?"

"I see a carriage coming."

"Carriages don't slander."

"But it is full of ladies, Max."

"Oh! That is a different statement

and increases the jeopardy. How do you know there are ladies in it?"

"By token of their silken robes and nodding plumes, sir."

A ripple of girlish laughter and a sounding blow from Max's hammer, as he drove the last nail home, put a period to their serio-comic conversation just as the prancing grays attached to the advancing vehicle came to a stand-still, with a proud toss of their flowing manes by way of protest against the stoppage. Quietly laying down his tools as the driver's "oh! boys," informed him that his own gate was their destination, and ridding himself of his working gloves as he advanced, Mr. Morgan assisted the inmates of the vehicle to alight with as much sang-froid as if they, Wickam's extreme fashionables, had found him creditably engaged in reading Blackstone, instead of discreditably, in mending his garden fence. If the whole truth must be told, he did not even have the grace to look ashamed of his occupation, as, brushing any suspicion of soil clinging to his gray cassimeres, carelessly away, lifting his hat to greet them in his own gravely dignified fashion, his hair was discovered clinging to his broad white forehead, in damp rings, scandalously suggestive of manual labor.

A bevy of four gorgeously arrayed young ladies alighted and fluttered, preceded by Delphine, across Max's gem of a garden, paling the tulips and dahlias into insignificance in their transit. Bird-like notes of admiration floated back to where Max had taken possession of Delphine's vacated seat and was idly toying with the tiny gold thimble she had left there with her discarded work.

"What an exquisite place!"

"Those superb petunias!"

"That heavenly solitäni!"

"What a perfect jewel of a gardener Miss Morgan must have."

Delphine hoped Max was within hearing, as she replied gravely: "She has."

"How long has she had the treasure?"

"He was here before I was born."

"What! How in the world does she manage to keep him?"

"She feeds him well. My aunt Weyland says that is the secret of managing almost every man."

"But where did she get him?"

"He was a God-send. Mr. Morgan is our gardener."

"Mr. Morgan!"

Four voices simultaneously uttered the name, for that handsome Mr. Maxwell Morgan, attorney and counsellor at law, was the object of open admiration and secret adoration to more than one youthful Wickamite of the soft sex, and to find that the hand for which they would willingly have exchanged their own jewelled ones, actually hoed and raked and dug as any hired man or Irish ditcher might have hoed and raked and dug, was a most cruel shock.

In answer to the summons which Delphine hastened to convey, Miss Morgan soon entered the parlor, and then came to light the occasion of this sudden influx from the fashionable quarter of Wickam.

A church fair was in progress! Would not good Miss Morgan assist? and there were also to be tableaux, and they had come to beg her to lend them Miss Delphine. Pretty girls were so scarce (here the pretty speaker looked conscious of one notable exception to the scarcity), that unless every one would help, their tableaux would certainly prove a failure.

Eleanor had a cold negative ready, but glancing at Delphine before giving it, she found her face brimful of happy excitement. It was impossible to say "no" with that bright face pleading for "yes."

So Delphine was loaned, and the ladies made happy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAIR AND THE TABLEAUX.

A day or two after the descent upon Miss Morgan, which resulted in the loan of Delphine for the tableaux, there appeared in the Wickam Weekly Watchman a harmless-looking announcement to the effect that the ladies of the Locust Street Church proposed, D. V., holding a fair, for one night only, for the benefit of the Church. For one night only! Let discreet silence be maintained relative to the day before the fair, the day of the fair, and the day after the fair. All the glory, profit and compensation clustered round that one night only. But that one night only was an event which *cast its shadow before.*

What cared that noble army of martyrs, the public, coming en masse, amiably bent upon being fleeced, of the herculean task it had been to convert a weather-stained tobacco warehouse into a fairy palace for one night only? What did they know of the anguish which filled Mrs. Tomlinson's soul, because Mrs. Robinson's table was just under the big chandelier, when she had said, from the very first, hers was going to be? or of the dismay of the unhappy woman, whose sole source of revenue was strawberries and ice-cream, at the vicious refusal of the cream to freeze? or of the physical agony Miss Walker was enduring from tight shoes, the while she bent smilingly over her table to persuade a white-bearded deacon in the Church that the one thing lacking to his perfect happiness here below was possession of some of the handsome articles which she would sell him so low?

On to the charge was the battle cry of the fair money-changers, fighting upon the principle that the end justifies the means.

The soupdness of which principle Mr. Maxwell Morgan, entering the rooms at the advanced hour of eleven, took the liberty of doubting.

It had not been without a demurrer on his part that Delphine had been allowed to take an active part in the tableaux which were to form the crowning glory of the entertainment. His sister's promise he could have nullified; but when Delphine herself, with hands folded in petition, and eyes sparkling with eagerness, had stood before him with her: "Please, dear Max, say yes." Max had said "yes" in spite of himself, and had escorted his sister and her to the rooms early in the evening, promising to return at a later hour.

So he did. But as he threaded his way through the crowd, his handsome head towering above the majority, making him a conspicuous target for old ladies who had just one more chance left for that superb quilt; young ladies who insisted upon selling him something he did not require; and middle-aged ladies who begged to be allowed to make a tailor's dummy of him for the display of a dressing-gown, he repented him that he had allowed their fresh little Delphine to be thrown into this whirl.

At the magic hour of midnight the clatter subsided as the crowd settled it-

self in preparation for the tableaux. Mr. and Miss Morgan chanced to occupy seats behind a group of young men whose chatter was almost unendurable.

A murmur of admiration ran through the crowd as the rising curtain displayed to their gaze Conrad the Corsair, tenderly bearing the dark-eyed Gulnare to a place of safety.

Borne aloft upon the stalwart arms of her bandit guardian, her lovely black hair floating unconfined down her back, the jewelled rosettes upon her tiny slippers touching the sword-hilt upon the Corsair's thigh; her splendid eyes, Oriental in their lustrous darkness, glowing with the light of intense excitement, Delphine Staunton gazed down upon the crowd, forgetting her rôle of picturesque calm, as she searched eagerly through the crowd for the only two whose admiration she cared to win.

The girl that night, as she stood patiently, while able hands transformed her into a happy likeness of the fair Gulnare, had received a revelation! She knew she was beautiful! And the soul within that budding form would not have been a woman's soul had it not bounded with gladness at the thought.

Would Eleanor and Max think her beautiful that night? Ah! She hoped so; and a sigh of ecstasy escaped from her rich full lips as she turned from the mirror where she had lingered, in rapt surprise at her own loveliness, naïvely unconscious that she was winning an unmerited reputation for vanity.

It took her but a second to descry Max, but the delighted recognition of her queenship's supreme beauty, which she had hoped to read in his eyes, was not there. Instead, a sternness almost amounting to savageness sat upon his brow. Never before had she seen that look upon Max's face.

The curtain fell, and Gulnare springing nimbly from the embrace of the Corsair, sped back to the greenroom with tears of disappointment welling into her eyes.

What cared she that the loud clapping of hands on the other side of the curtain and the vociferous encores proclaimed the success of her appearance?

Eleanor had looked serious and Max

looked angry, and the poor little queen of the harem tore her jewelled diadem from her brow with girlish petulance, just as Conrad came smilingly forward:

"They are calling us back, Miss Staunton."

"I am not going back, Mr. Hardaway," said the uncrowned queen, with such decision of voice and manner that tableau number two was put into immediate preparation.

On the other side of the curtain the shadow was darkening on Max's brow.

"By jupiter!" cried one of the youths, before mentioned, "isn't she a trump, though?"

"Little beauty and no mistake."

"Maybe if I was that lucky dog Hardaway, I'd let go tonight."

With a blow of thunder and a voice quivering with suppressed passion, Mr. Morgan leaned forward, and, touching the last speaker smartly on the shoulder with his glove, he said: "Sir, the young lady you are discussing so freely is a member of my family. You will please select another topic of conversation, and that immediately." Waiting just long enough to see that his suggestion was acted upon, Max, with a face full of disgust silently offered his arm to his sister, and together they went in search of Queen Gulnare, just giving her time to find her out-door wraps.

Pondering upon her brother's undue excitement, coupling it with the flash of passionate admiration she had surprised in his expressive eyes, the moment when Delphine had burst so gloriously upon their view, followed by his extreme irritation at the wordy admiration of others, Miss Morgan, well versed in reading men's souls, felt a great load of anxiety settling down upon hers. It was trouble coming from a source so little suspected that it took her unawares.

So the three walked homeward, Max moody, Eleanor depressed, and Delphine tasting bitterly that drop of gall which mingles ever with earth's sweetest draughts.

On the day after the fair, upon casting up accounts, the lady managers returned the unanimous decision—a grand success—but there were sundry and various private decisions per contra.

CHAPTER V.

TOMORROW.

"Tomorrow! The mysterious unknown guest,
Who cries to me: 'remember, Barmecide,
And tremble to be happy with the rest.'
And I make answer: I am satisfied."
—*Longfellow.*

The next morning found Delphine, in common with many another youthful Wickamite, suffering from a complaint which, though traceable, definable and symptomatic, being one of the most decided ills that human flesh is heir to, has never been treated of scientifically by pathologists. Traceable to undue and excessive excitement; definable as an affection of the nervous system; symptomatic as indicated by white cheeks, heavy eyes, and general conviction of the hollowness of life and its allurements.

It is but proper to observe here, that this complaint never attacks the very young or the very old. Those in the prime of life are most subject to it. It frequently becomes epidemic after balls and "lodge meetings." It may be called reaction.

"Nonee!" said the suffering ex-Queen Gulnare (addressing Miss Morgan by the pet corruption of her Christian name, with which she always introduced a petition), "suppose we go to see Dan. I know the old place is looking its prettiest now, and I am so tired of people and things."

Glancing toward the speaker over his morning paper Max, was startled by the whiteness of her cheeks and the dulness of her eyes.

"The child is looking badly, Eleanor," he said quickly; "I think her suggestion a good one. Take her down to the place and let her run around in the woods until she wins back the bloom she has sacrificed in the good cause."

"Don't put it on such a magnificent footing, Max; I begged Nonee to let me act in the tableaux because I thought it was going to be fun."

"Well, and was it not 'fun?'"

"No—it was stupid."

"What made it stupid?"

"You."

"I!"

"Yes, you, Max. Everybody told me, before the curtain rose, that I was beautiful, and I thanked them for it, for oh! Max, it does make me feel so happy to have people praise me, and when I stood before the long glass in the dressing-room

dressed as Queen Gulnare, I saw that I was beautiful and it made me glad, and I was quivering for the curtain to rise because I thought you and Nonee were going to be glad too, to see me look so pretty, and when the curtain rolled up I looked about for you two, and there you sat; Nonee looking as serious as if I had been doing something awful and you looking as glum—asglum—why just twice as glum, Max, as when Lady Gay jumped over the garden fence and ate up your finest gladioluses."

Max's sober face relaxed into a smile of pity for such genuine distress.

"But every one else applauded. All the world but my 'glum self' seemed to think you pretty."

"What's all the world to me—or I to all the world? That was not what I wanted. I wanted to make you and dear Nonee happy."

"And do you think you can do that simply by being beautiful, my dear?" interposed Eleanor, very gravely.

"Not by being beautiful alone, Nonee; but does it not give you pleasure to look at pretty things? And when we are pleased are we not on the way to being made happy?"

"Undoubtedly. But, Delphine, nothing mars the pleasure of contemplating a beautiful face more than the self-consciousness of its owner."

"Self-consciousness!"

"An amiable substitute for vanity, child," said Max, somewhat tartly, for he began to fear that the hurt to the freshness of this cherished soul-flower of theirs was greater than had at first appeared.

"Vanity!" said Delphine, casting back the charge of vanity in reproachful tones, while she looked her accusers proudly but sadly in the face, "I am not vain, and it is cruel in both of you to call me so. God gave me my beauty, and I thank Him for the gift, for oh! I do hate ugliness in man, or in beast, or in nature. But I no more take credit to myself for pleasing others with my looks than your roses do, Max, for making you happy by being beautiful, or your violets for giving pleasure by their sweetness. I think vanity is the silliest of all weaknesses and I despise it. But if, by self-consciousness, Nonee, you mean, to reproach me for knowing that I am pretty, I am sorry, but I cannot promise to unknow it."

"The child is right," said Max, "and we, her accusers, do acquit her of the charge of that 'silliest of all weaknesses,' vanity. Now, Miss Staunton, when shall we pay Sergeant Danbury a visit?"

"Tomorrow. Oh! Max, tomorrow, please."

"Tomorrow, then. Now go make up for your loss of sleep," and, passing his hand gently across the young brow, as if to smooth away the shadow he had helped Eleanor fling there, he let it rest for a moment in silent benediction, then stooped to print a peace-making kiss on the upturned face, before leaving the house for his office.

Delphine was right. The old place was indeed looking its very prettiest as she and Miss Morgan, having dismissed their hired conveyance at the boundary gate, walked leisurely up to the house by way of the live-oak avenue, among whose branches a multitude of happy birds were rejoicing in the golden flood of light cast into their leafy fastnesses by the setting sun.

"Let us surprise them, Nonee." Delphine had suggested, and nothing loth to get the full benefit of the pure country air; Miss Morgan had dismissed the carriage and consented to this walk.

The premises had been very much improved within a few years, through the devoted energy of Sergeant Danbury.

On this particular occasion he and "the old mother" were sitting out-doors upon a side terrace, in placid enjoyment, he of his pipe, she of that soberly engaging volume, Baxter's *Saints' Rest*, both of the Lord's blessed sunshine, when suddenly that sunshine was shut out from the old soldier's vision by a bandage of white fingers.

"The little lady! God bless the bits of hands, there's not another pair like them this side of where His angels stand."

"You stupid Dan, when will you stop flattering me in that ridiculous fashion?"

"Flattery, I take it, little lady, is false praise," and stupid Dan bustled about in an ecstasy of welcome to bring seats for his two visitors.

"Now, Dan," said my Lady Paramount, locating her low wicker rocking-chair (which was religiously regarded as sacred to her use) where she could get the best view of the calm woodland scenery surrounding her home, "begin and tell me just what you and the mother, and the flowers, and the chickens, and all the

rest of my pets have been doing since I was here."

Thus summoned to give an account of himself, before the highest earthly tribunal his simple soul acknowledged, the old Sergeant answered promptly:

"By way of work, planting out horse-chestnuts in your cross walk, that's to lead to the pond under the willows. By way of rest, smoking the handsome pipe you brought me last time, while I carved them cedar brackets you was saying you'd like to have for your flower-vases. By way of pleasure, looking forward to this blessed coming of good Miss Morgan and you. That's about all, little lady, and a poor showing it makes when you come to sum it up in words. I think the flowers and the chickens can show a better record after all, for they've been growing and getting handsomer against your coming."

"Don't you go to doing either, Dan, for if you should grow any more I would have to go up stairs to look you in the eyes, and if you should get handsomer you wouldn't be the dear old Dan I've been abusing ever since I could talk. And the mother?" Miss Staunton's rocking-chair performed a feat to which well-bred rocking-chairs are not much given: it revolved upon one rocker for the purpose of bringing its occupant's bright eyes to bear upon this diminutive mother of a gigantic son.

To Delphine's inquiry she answered, serving the Lord, child, according to my dim lights. Lending a helping hand to snatch brands from the burning, and only asking that it may please One above to let me stay in this vale of tears long enough to see them that is straying into the broad road of destruction, before my very eyes, turn to Jesus."

"That's me, the mother means," said the Sergeant, cheerfully and generously consenting to be locked upon as a brand in the burning, or a straying sheep, or anything else iniquitous, so that his mother's sweeping attack upon sinners should take on a personal and not a general tone, thereby giving offence.

"No, Dan," said Delphine with a merry laugh, "I am sure the mother means me, for she is always telling me how wicked I am."

"It is my duty, child. Does not the Lord's book tell you to receive instruction and despise it not?"

"Well, mother Danbury, I am not going to despise it, but at present I would rather receive some more news, after which a little more instruction, so that between Dan's news and your instruction I will be nice sandwiched. Proceed, Sergeant. Who is dead, and who is married, and who is gone, and who has come?"

"The old brindle steer is dead, little lady, and Squire Vincent's daughter is married. Good old parson Dawson's gone, and a new minister, that they do say is just a second St. Paul, or whichever was the best of that old time lot, is come in his place."

"Poor old Brindle! Tell me something more about your new minister. I like new people."

"Well, you see, little lady, he's more in the mother's line of trade than in mine; better ask her. All I know is his name is the Reverend Harris Samuels."

"A most God-like youth, and one who will surely find favor in the eyes of the Lord."

"Does he preach good sermons mother?"

"None better since the disciples learned from the Lamb how to talk with sinning man."

"And reads the service well?"

"As if taught by them above."

"Now then, Nonee, we will go to see this second St. Paul for ourselves tomorrow, won't we?"

The little church in which the Rev. Harris Samuels held forth was as modest and unpretending a building as was ever erected to the glory of God. It was a plain weather-boarded oblong room, entered by way of a small portico, over the sides and roof of which a glorious cloth of gold rose, climbed and entwined itself gracefully, casting beauty and sweetness about the rough boards, as if lovingly intent upon hiding their ugliness from unkind looks. The church stood in a clump of magnificent forest trees, scarce over a mile from the dwelling-house on the Staunton place, and as the way all along was pleasantly wooded, Eleanor and her ward preferred walking to riding.

They were a little late in arriving. Delphine had tarried too long in her morning visits to her various quadruped and feathered pensioners, and as they stepped within the shadow of the rose-tree the Benedictus was being sung by a

sparse but sweet-voiced choir, aided by a small melodeon, evidently handled by a master hand.

Miss Morgan and Delphine paused outside, preferring to enter at its close. With somewhat of girlish curiosity the latter glanced towards the reading-desk, where stood the youthful pastor of this simple flock. His eyes (a deep violet eye, made deeper by very long and dark lashes) rested calmly upon the singers with no tragic straining after holy abstraction, but with the rational look of a good man listening with sober pleasure to God's praises, though, maybe, not sung by first-class artists. He was far from vigorous in appearance; slender almost to attenuation, he was still strikingly graceful; his face was, without being strictly handsome, winning in the extreme, from the gentleness of his expression, the beauty of his mouth (clothed simply with a dark mustache), and the luminous charm of his eyes. But never were physical attractions bestowed upon one who valued them less. For, with a pure heart, a clear head and an exalted soul, Harris Samuels had entered the vineyard of the Lord to do with his might what his hands found there to do, and a most efficient laborer was he proving himself to be.

Remembering the text was not our Delphine's forte, and yet the time never came when she could not have told you that the Rev. Mr. Samuels took his text on that bright May Sabbath from St. John, the third chapter and sixteenth verse:

"So God loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life."

"So God *loved* the world." The words were repeated softly and tenderly by the young pastor, as if he too loved the world after the manner of Him he preached. And then there fell upon the ears of the few gathered there together (and into their souls, too, let us hope) the Gospel of Love.

Deep into the tenderly receptive nature of Delphine Staunton sunk the holy influences of that day. Through the opened windows her glance (not so faithful to the speaker as her ears to his discourse) took in (somewhat as an illustration to the text) glimpses of the far away blue skies where dwelt that God who so loved the world that He filled it full of

Nearer still the solemn shadows grand old oaks inclined the heart to meditation upon the wisdom of that love in all His providing the welfare of ungrateful men. His discourse was wisely brought to a close before weariness came in to draw the rapt attention of the congregation.

"Remember," said Delphine, as they two, mother and the mother, walked homeward through the pleasant woodland, "I had four tomorrows this week, but none of them have been so perfect as this."

"I am sure of your four tomorrows," said Eleanor, long since too familiar with the girl's original and often happy way of putting things to it upon it.

Wednesday, my tomorrow was to be the gayest, happiest time a girl could have; for I was to be Queen Gulnare, and have a life-time of fun in that one hour. But somehow or other, it was not a happy time at all. There was fretting and worrying and little nature among the women that kept me exclaiming aloud: "From all sorts of heart; from pride, vain glory, poe-ris-y; from envy, hatred, and and all uncharitableness, good liver us!"

Thursday, my tomorrow was to be a shower of compliments and things from you and Max, and I was to be treated with distinguished attention as a successful debutante, a holiday from books and feel generally. Instead of which it was the saddest tomorrow of them all. I got snubbed by you and I was told to go to sleep, rather than to do much of.

Friday, my tomorrow was my last here, which was pleasant in anticipation and in reality. I said a word to say against that one thing that there was not much novelty in it. It was simply nice.

This day has been Saturday's tomorrow, and oh! what a happy day it was. Nonee, do you know I could—I could be very good, with Mr. Max, to help me.

This has been the best tomorrow of all.

Through that day life seemed to be my earnest affair.

Winds, whispering through her

ancestral oaks, breathed solemn messages to her awakened soul. The birds singing in their branches were but echoing to her vivid fancy, the sweet hymn with which that day's services had closed in the little wooden church.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," seemed a commandment of such solemn import, such easy observance.

CHAPTER VI.

A SOUL IN JEOPARDY.

"To find a noble soul is gain; it is nobler to keep it; and the noblest and most difficult is to save that which is already lost."—HERDER.

The household of the Rev. St. John Ames was subject, once in a while, to stagnation, physical, moral and mental, when life and the interest of life were thoroughly becalmed.

What other possible resultant: given—June's radiant heat, Sabbath day restrictions, and the necessity for "setting a good example," with no greater facilities for conquering the old man Adam than other folks are blessed with.

With what divine element or admixture of holiness do we accredit the feeble mortality that enters into the composition of a minister's family, that their most innocent peccadilloes, their slightest trespass should elicit such agonies of surprise?

Alas! then, for the reputation of those should-be-perfects, the Ames, on that radiant Sunday in June, which found them stagnant. For, after all, that consecrated household was composed of flesh and blood, and affections and passions, in no important wise differing from yours and mine, iniquitous reader.

In the family sitting-room, Miss Susie Ames and her brother Augustus were avenging themselves on fate by open denunciation of its hard decrees.

Susie had expressed, not for the first time by many, her sense of the hardship of a minister's family's life.

"I say Susan, why not follow my example?"

"To do that often, would involve a saint in trouble."

"Sharp! by George! I am afraid church-going has a tendency to acidify our temper. I shall forewarn the Rev. of the danger of compulsory attendance on your part."

"By George! Augustus, do you suppose that in all Wickam there is another young man, who passes for a gentleman, that speaks as coarsely as you do?"

"Can't say. Will inquire for your benefit."

"And you a minister's son too!"

"Well, my minister's daughter, there is this difference between us. I never advertised as a saint. Don't bank much on my company manners. But when it comes to private home spitefulness I bow me in admiration of your superior talents. You can beat me too easily to talk about it."

Miss Ames's face flushed crimson, and she slapped spitefully at a fly which had all the family traits of pertinacity and aggravatingness of the individual on the study window. Else, surely, it would have long since given up the effort to extract sweetness from that brown mole on the young lady's under lip, which any fly of the slightest observation would have known by this time to be flavorless.

"Do you know your part of that new voluntary, Gus?" she asked, presently, in a soothing voice. For Augustus was such an uncouth savage that unless he was mollified before they left the house for church, the whole world could see he had been in a temper, and church time was now rapidly approaching.

"No!" savagely.

"Come. I will practice it with you."

"Thanks, no," and Mr. Ames stretched his handsome person luxuriously out upon the settee, in preparation for another nap, triumphing in the fact that he was leaving Susie in that comfortable position, known as being on "pins and needles."

"Augustus," (despairingly) "don't go to sleep now, it is almost church time."

"Church be hanged!"

"And father will be so angry with you."

"Father be—"

"Augustus!"

"Su—San!"

"I'd rather be a dog—" began Susie hysterically.

"And bay the moon," her brother interpolated drowsily.

"Than be a minister's daughter, from whom perfection is looked for, with such a brother to keep one's temper at boiling point."

"The greater the cross—the greater the crown, my dear."

"Then my crown ought to be very great because—"

"You are so very cross. Yes, dear, quite right. Good night. Now I lay me down to—sleep."

So when the Rev. St. John emerged from his study, satisfied that he was prepared to enlighten his people about the victorious Chedorlaomer in the valley of Siddim, he found his wife and daughter vainly trying to arouse Augustus to a sense of his condition and his duty. The while Susie petulantly explained how closely she had remained with him all evening to prevent this very catastrophe, and how hard she had tried to get him to practice the voluntary with her, and how she had talked to him about his duty as a minister's son—until her partial hearers were fully convinced that Susan had been her own angelic self through the whole ordeal.

For a moment the Rev. St. John stood over the prostrate form of his first-born, gazing as the old Roman might have gazed when about to utter sentence of death upon the sons of his loins:

"Let the boy alone—" was all he said—and turned away to get him to his pulpit.

So they let the boy alone—but in the mother's tender soul, that evening, the weight of his error lay like molten lead—and try as she would to give all her thoughts to God and Mr. Ames—yearningly they wandered back to the little sitting-room—where upon the settee lay stretched the handsome boy who should have been the pride and glory of her waning years—who promised to be their shame and grief.

"Augustus Ames you are a pitiful sneak!"

The accusation rang out upon the darkened stillness of the little sitting-room in the parsonage in such scorn-laden accents, that to see the accused shrivel into nothingness where he lay, would have been no matter of marvel.

And maybe so he would have shrivelled, had his accuser stood before him in the gloaming, clothed in the flesh of a fellow-man, adding the curl of a lip, or the flash of an eye, to the stinging lash of the words.

But it was only conscience, who was not dead but sleeping, in Augustus Ames's bosom, and was sometimes so sore pressed

by his short comings as to lift up its voice in his hours of loneliness and dejection to utter its reproaches aloud.

What with the darkness and the stillness and the dejection born of reaction, it was a golden opportunity for conscience to make one more effort for his redemption.

But where is the man that will sit quietly and listen to the voice of conscience like a chidden child? Conscience had called him a "pitiful sneak," and he had sullenly pleaded guilty to the charge, for it was so particularly true of him on that particular occasion. He had sneaked out of that evening's attendance at church and there was no other word for it. He had **not** been asleep when Susie began her assault; had heard every word said. It had been hard to lie quiet when his mother's gentle voice pleaded to him.

With him, haunting him, dogging him went the image of his mother's sad face. How many of the furrows on that gentle forehead had her son ploughed? The desire to make the amende seized upon him. He would go to church, late as it was, just for the pleasure it would give that dear mother. He would bring her home leaning on his arm. They would walk slowly, very slowly to get out of ear-shot of his father and Susie (God help him, he sometimes feared he was learning to hate his sister), and then he would tell his mother how much ashamed of himself he was, and how much in earnest he was about reformation.

In pursuance of these good intentions he walked very rapidly toward the church, as does a man who feels himself none too sure of himself, consciously full of those doubts which are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.

He arrived at the church door brimful of good intentions and courage. The bright lights streaming out upon him seemed to welcome him and beckon him on encouragingly. He paused for a second, for it was not so easy to enter amid all those curious eyes, running the gauntlet of wandering glances, to reach the minister's pew just under the pulpit.

The services were concluded and the sonorous voice of his Rev. Father was ringing harshly out over the listening congregation, in wrathful commentaries upon the sin of rebellion in general, a

vein suggested by the sin of that particular rebel, Bera, who fought against Chedorlaomer in the valley of Siddim, some time ago.

Augustus's feet refused to carry him farther. He wished he had not come so far. His eyes were fastened on his father's stern face; and every word that fell from those merciless lips seemed hurled straight at him as he stood out there in the outer darkness which was but symbolical of that worse darkness, into which he supposed he would eventually be cast, as the reward for the deeds done in the flesh.

He was a rebel! Had rebelled that very night against parental authority. Maybe some of the fierce earnestness which seemed to inspire his father's denunciation of rebels, was but the legitimate result of his own disobedience.

Stern as his father's face always looked, seen by the glare of his pulpit lamps, through the distorting medium of his own excited fancy, it looked unusually so to Augustus; then how could he muster the courage to face those accusing eyes, as he would have to do, on his way to his mother's side? Better not risk it. He was sorry he could not carry out that little plan about comforting his mother; but, "by George," it took more "pluck" than he was master of, to face "father when his blood was up." He would go back to the house and wait for them to come home; then when the dear mother came to his bed-room, as she always did the last thing at night, he would pour out all his bottled-up remorse.

There was plenty of time, though, when father got on one of his Old Testament texts. It took him about a quarter of an hour to introduce the people he was going to preach about to the congregation, another quarter to give them a lesson in ancient geography, still another to tell them what he thought about all those old-time folks, and the last quarter to tell them what they ought to think. Besides his "in conclusions" and his "one-more-words" consumed a good section of another hour, so he was quite safe to drop in at Judge Weyland's on his way home, and spend a few moments with his aunt Catherine, who, somehow or other, was always gay and chatty, and handsome and happy.

He was later getting home than he expected to be. A light was burning in his own bed-room windows. He was

softly round by the gravel walk until he reached the wing in which it was located. The curtains were undrawn. Sitting by the little table was his mother; the lamp shone on her face—sad and tear-stained; she started and gave a nervous little shriek, as Augustus, placing one hand on the low sill, sprang lightly into the room.

"Mother! I've been making your heart ache again. I am a wretch. But I love you, darling mother, and maybe if you'll still try to believe in me a little, I'll pull through all right yet."

And the mother did the only thing there was for her to do. She kissed him, and asked God to bless her boy.

CHAPTER VII.

"A well brought up dog,
Beast or body, education should ave be minded."
—Scott.

"You are wanted at home—come at once—leave the child where she is.

Max."

It was this telegram, laconic in expression, mystifying in tendency, which sent Miss Morgan back to Wickam on the Monday following her arrival, when she had fully intended to stay the two promised weeks with Delphine, at the old place.

The call must be very urgent to induce cool, deliberate Max to telegraph, and although the injunction, to "leave the child where she was," appeared unaccountable and vexatious, she had learned from experience that Max seldom preferred idle requests, so it was probable he had better reasons than she could guess at for wanting Delphine to remain where she was.

The ominous yellow envelope (which used as they so often are to speed the dart which is to pierce some tender loving heart, with the cruel intelligence of calamity, death, or ruin—is seldom torn open with untremulous fingers) was handed to Miss Morgan just as she had risen from the tea-table.

"Going home!" a girlish wail of disappointment greeted her announced intention. "Why we've just begun to enjoy ourselves, haven't we, Dan?"

"You shall not be disappointed of your visit. Max especially tells me to leave you here to finish it. And when you get tired of people and things,

down here, the Sergeant will bring you back to us.

"Thanks, dear, good Nonee. It is so delicious out here now, with the bright colors in the Heavens above, and the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth, all seeing which can fling the gayest banner to the breeze. What is there in red and green Wickam that could lure one back from this green velvet grass, dotted all over with Dan's bright zenias and portulaccas; or that gorgeous blue sky all smeared with gold, and purple, and red, and lilac in great dashes, as if the angel who had charge of the Heavenly scenery had grown lazy, and dragged his paint-brush listlessly across the blue; or our ambitious little Lake, that thinks to reflect all the glory above until the geese go splashing into it and break its cloud pictures up into wee bits."

Eleanor smiled her usual indulgent smile at this girlish rhapsody. Dan declared that the little lady was talking the old place into beauty, while mother Danbury interrupted her eloquence to charge her with impiety and irreverence by talking of the skies as if they were but a bit of painted scenery and the angels no better than whitewashers.

Delphine just turned her big brown eyes upon the "unco guid" woman, in that inquiring fashion she had about her, whenever novel specimens of the genus homo fell under her observation, and then returned to the matter in hand.

"There's nothing in red and green, Wickam to lure one back unless, maybe, it might be Evelyn and Max," Eleanor was saying in a musing manner as if taxing memory to recall one good thing within the despised brick and mortar limits.

"Oh! Nonee, I am a wretch."

"Yes, dear, but now let us talk about what you are going to do when I've left you to your own wayward devices."

"Oh! I am going to be just as good as gold, and mind every word mother Danbury and Dan say to me."

Miss Morgan's face was brimful of incredulity; "provided always they take good care not to say a word which does not tally with your own wishes."

Even the old Sergeant's rugged face had an unbelieving look about it. But although she somewhat doubted that promise of obedience, Miss Morgan knew the child (as the fast-budding woman was still called in her adopted home) to be

ly in every way. For she had filled her promise to the girl's father, as to have made of Delphine, brave-hearted girl, afraid of nothing, but a meanness or a lie. Having travelled back towards Wickham, she found her heart much fuller of anxiety over Max's mysterious telegram, and she told Delphine.

The young lady inaugurated the novel of obedience to her slave, Sergeant Danbury, by promptly laughing to scorn the feeble effort to enforce it. "You know you know, Dan," she then reminded of her promise to her father, "that meant I was going to do a very sensible word you said. I am sure that Nonce herself would not object to my taking a walk by myself through those solemn old woods. It is just like going to vespers!"

It was a feminine for leaving a door unlocked behind her, to slip through, and miss her get burdensome. But, then, I never spoke better sense than when I objected to your going through them woods by your-

self, Dan; young ladies

are, then, if the word will better fit the holes weren't all dug up by young trees laying by 'em to be planted, I'd drop all holds on you myself. I'll be there to back safe, anyways." "Do you take me for a baby?" "I wish I could, Missy."

"Forward?" "Two lions rolled into the garden to make you afraid." "They could, Dan; don't fib. Are you haunted?"

"Nothin' more terrifyin' than rabbits, as I've ever heard." "What is the matter with you?" "The lady, its just the lonesome-ness of the thing I don't like. You so tender and the trees so big

. Well I don't propose to run away from 'em nor try to eat them; so loneliness will not afflict my ten-

ants, take Blucher along. He'll be in company." So he laid down his law without waiting for her permission, and the huge mastiff, whose actions were divided between obedience and Delphine, and commanded

him to follow the little lady, and take care of her.

In point of muscular strength and intellect dog Blucher was fully competent for the post assigned him. When the chains which bound him fell clanking upon the floor of his kennel, at this unusual hour, he knew he was to be put upon special duty. He stood patiently to have his collar readjusted with his great intelligent eyes fixed calmly upon the Sergeant's face, while receiving his orders. Sergeant Danbury pointed to Delphine's graceful form walking springingly away towards the woods.

Blucher looked at the girl, then back to the Sergeant, saying with his eyes:—well, what of her?

"Follow her—have a charge."

Blucher said in his own fashion, "I understand," and started after his charge with a slow steady trot, which promised fairly for overtaking Miss Staunton. Jumping, leaping and capering were feats of agility which the dignified Blucher left to harlequins and greyhounds. It behooved the dog who had just been honored with the grave charge of guarding the "Little Lady," to be serious, watchful and circumspect. He fairly bristled with the importance of his position. His long swinging trot brought him up with Delphine just as she passed into the shadow of the great trees. It was cool, and dark, and still under these; oh! so still, that it was difficult to think this shadowing forest was but one small section of the busy world where the sun shone garishly, and men struggled fiercely. The sun was still shining and would be for another long hour, but in the woods the shadows lay long, black and narrow across the path, like coffins awaiting their dead. She was the only thing there that moved, or lived, or had any being. All the world besides was dead!

A cold touch upon her hand, and a deep-toned bark dispelled the illusion.

Then she laughed aloud at her own nervous folly.

"After all, Blucher, I am glad you came. But then, I must acknowledge to Dan that I am both a baby and a coward."

Blucher wagged his assent and trotted to the front, quietly assuming the position of vanguard.

This walk of Delphine's through the sombre woods was not one of those

less rambles so affected by sentimental young ladies, who utilize every bit of woodland for their own romantic idling, fancying, maybe that the great woodman planted the majestic forests for no better purpose. Our young lady's walk had a purpose and a goal.

Sergeant Danbury had told her a pretty little story of how, it was said, the young minister might be seen every evening, just after the sun had dipped his hot and shining face into the cool gray shadows of the coming twilight, going over to the little church, with his blind mother leaning on his arm, and his sister, pretty Miss Samuels walking beside him with the chant books in her hand; and when they got to the little church, the blind mother would be seated at the organ, where she would play chants and hymns and all the rest, as well as if she had a dozen pair of eyes, and her two children, young St. Paul and pretty Miss Samuels would sing to her playing, all three of them making music fit for the angels to listen to, until it got too dark for the chant books to do any good; then they'd all walk home to the little parsonage the fire-flies lighting their way back, with their tiny lanterns."

It was this sight that Delphine declared she would see—these sounds she would hear. Harmless as was the curiosity, it was destined not to be gratified without an interlude not laid down in the programme of her expectations.

"Blucher," she said, presently, rather loudly and cheerily—(to keep up the dog's courage, maybe) "do you believe in ghosts?"

As an abstract question of private opinion, I do not believe Blucher did—but just at that critical moment, as if to revolutionize his views upon that subject, there appeared in the shady pathway before them, a figure white enough, and startling enough to have been either a ghost, or one of the sheeted dead for whom the forest coffins were waiting.

The sensate being, who was suddenly convinced that ghosts were not only possible but highly probable visitants of this earth, uttered a nervous little squeak, and stood stock still.

The insensate creature, to whom ghosts were no more awe-inspiring than any other tramps, showed two rows of very white teeth, and uttered a growl *full of menace*.

Upon which the ghost's white linen arms went up deprecatingly, and it proclaimed its nationality by exclaiming in agitated French:

"En nom Dieu—que voulez vous, Mademoiselle?"

So, after all, it was flesh and blood; very thin and pallid looking flesh, with scarcely quantum sufficit of blood, and the white linen summer apparel, though ghostly in color, was quite fashionable in cut.

The young lady, whom "two lions rolled into one" were to prove powerless to intimidate, heaved a sigh of inexpressible relief and uttered an imperative: "Down Blucher!"

Upon which it was the ghost's turn to heave a sigh of inexpressible relief. Loquacity rapidly superseded terror in its frivolous soul:

Mademoiselle, j'admire le soubriquet de votre chien."

But preventing a savage beast from making his supper off an attenuated Frenchman is one thing, and stopping to chat with that Frenchman is quite another. Miss Staunton drew her small person up with dignity, uttered what was meant for a whistle, and essayed to pass on toward her goal.

Distress flashed into the foreigner's pale face:

"N'allez pas! I am—what do you say?—malade. Entendez. I give mon exposé."

Now, without being a mistress of French, Delphine comprehended the language sufficiently to recognize the stranger's desire to detain her.

Should she hurl back some English-French for his French-English by way of intimidation, or hurry forward without waste of either language?

Best hurry forward.

A nervous grasp upon the boa which was thrown loosely over her shoulders made her start, and glance fearfully at her detainer. His eyes, glowing with feverish brightness were fixed imploringly upon her. His breath, hot and quick, fanned her cheek.

With one bound the girl was beyond his reach, leaving the boa in his hands.

"You wretch, how dare you! Touch me again and I will make Blucher pin you to the first tree."

Her words conveyed no meaning to the foreigner's bewildered senses. Her flashing eyes and significant gesture to-

ward the monstrous dog conveyed a great deal.

Submissively the daring hands were folded over the Frenchman's heart. Quietly he bowed and motioned her to pass on.

"Mademoiselle meestakes. Je suis un gentilhomme." I am désorienté."

But Delphine had but little faith in gentlemen who were désorienté and wandering about in the woods. Blucher should keep him where he was, until she had found her way out of this lonely spot.

"Watch him, Blucher," was the order she gave, and the well-trained animal knew he was simply to detain, but not injure his prisoner.

Better had it been for the poor prisoner had he been equally well-informed; for, when the hard-hearted young lady walked coolly forward, leaving his four-footed custodian glaring at him with his fiery eyes, and showing those sharp, white teeth ominously, if he did but shift his position from one travel-worn leg to the other, despair seized upon him and he cursed the unlucky chance which directed his vagrant steps towards the woods, which had promised shelter for his fever-racked frame, but had turned out to be a den of wild beasts.

Nor is he much to be blamed for so classifying his shaggy bailiff.

Knowing full well that Blucher was better than a pair of handcuffs for restless evil-doers, Delphine walked quickly, but with placid pleasure through the short skirt of woods now intervening between her and the church.

The sound of the organ floated sweetly out on the calm evening air. They were there, then! Presently the united voices of brother and sister swelled deliciously above the notes of the organ—and slipping quietly up into the rose-shielded porch, she entered into her reward.

The fire-flies were lighting their small lanterns in rapid succession, but there she sat as motionless as a little church mouse—fully intending to slip up and be gone when she heard them closing the organ.

But night was upon her! Blucher was away off with that horrid Frenchman! She dared not encounter him again. She was frightened. Why didn't Dan come? He said he would. Her fears had made her careless of the sounds within the church. She was gazing anxiously down

the dreary looking road, praying almost that Dan's burly figure might loom up from the woods.

"Am I mistaken in thinking this is my young neighbor, Miss Staunton?"

Delphine started and crimsoned with embarrassment, but she had her wits sufficiently about her to place her hand confidently in the one the pastor held out.

"I have been stealing some very pleasant moments; I walked from home to hear your music; Sergeant Danbury was to come for me, but has not; I left my dog watching an impertinent foreigner in the woods, and so here I must wait until Dan comes for me. Please, though, don't let me detain you, I'm not a bit afraid to sit here until they come for me, for I can see the lights in your windows and they look friendly"—she spoke with nervous haste to account for her lonely presence.

"Which I should certainly not be, if I let my young neighbor sit here, like a misdirected package, to be kept until called for. But before we talk about home let me introduce my mother and sister. You are one of my flock, so long as you sojourn at the homestead, and, as your pastor, I think I may presume so far."

"Oh! thank you; nothing would give me more pleasure than to know you as my pastor. I was in church last Sunday."

"I saw you there."

Delphine wondered if it were quite orthodox for the minister to see anybody when he was in the pulpit. Ought he not to forget everything but God and the angels? She did not pursue her theological ruminations very far, however, for she was being formally introduced to the blind Mrs. Samuels and the sweet-faced sister of her pastor friend.

She was urged to go over to the parsonage and there await the coming of Sergeant Danbury. But a great fear had seized upon her, and she stoutly declared she must go home at once. Dan would come across the Frenchman; see Blucher there, recognize her boar, not be able to understand anything about it at all; and Dan was so big and the foreigner so little, who knew but what murder might come of it all? She must go, she said nervously. Seeing her determination, the Rev. Mr. Samuels quietly drew her arm within his and turned toward the woods.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERY.

"Women have tongues of craft and hearts of gulle,
They will, they will not; fools that on them trust;
For in their speech is death, hell in their smile."

—Tasso.

Mr. Morgan was waiting with a conveyance at the depot when Eleanor reached Wickam.

"What is it, Max?" was her second inquiry. Her first was: "Nothing is wrong with Delphine, is it?"

"God only knows!" he answered, voice and face full of worry; "trouble ahead for the child, I am afraid."

(Max always used that definite article as if there was but one single child in the world.)

"For Delphine! In what shape and from what quarter?"

"In the shape of a *soi-disant* mother, from an unknown quarter."

"A mother!"

"Let me tell you quickly all I know myself."

Then Max entered into a hurried account of the strange occurrence which had necessitated his telegram. Hurried, because there were reasons why he wished to conclude the recital before they were deposited at their own door.

This was what he told her:

He had just settled himself with a freshly lighted cigar, after having rolled Evelyn's easy chair out upon the verandah, and they were silently enjoying the delicious fragrance wafting toward them from his splendid night-blooming jessamine, when, without premonition of wheels or any other sound of approach, they heard the front gate open, then swing slowly backward on its hinges, as if leaving a reluctant hand, after which footsteps, hardly more audible than a cat's would have been, fell upon the gravel approach to the house.

The hall lamp presently showed them a female figure, walking quickly toward the steps with a mincing, noiseless tread; very much as one might walk if trying to creep up on something or somebody unawares.

When she reached the door, Max had met her with a polite invitation to walk in, taking it for granted that it was some would-be client, whose business was of such vital importance, in her own estimation, that it could not wait for regular office hours.

"When I got her into the broad glare

of the lamp," said Max, essaying the description with his man's clumsy tongue, "it required an effort on my part not to let my gaze of polite attention degenerate into a stare of absolute rudeness, such a queer-looking body it was. She was an elderly woman, who may once have been handsome, but never refined. She represents herself as poverty stricken now, and apologizes with ill-bred profusion for her shabby appearance. Its shabbiness one could pardon, but there is a tawdry pretension to style about her whole outfit, which is simply disgusting. She had one good feature only. That is her eye, but it gives you no pleasure. It is so large and tender and dark that you are ready to call it glorious, until you notice that, splendid as her eyes are, and vain as she might pardonably be of them, she never lets them rest fully and squarely upon you, even while she is talking to you. There is a furtive unrestful look about them; she holds her head slightly bowed in speaking, and when compelled to flash her lustrous eyes up at you, instead of sending them with the pretty woman's don't-you-admire-them look, she drops the lids over them, as if they were tale-bearers that must be put into dark closets."

There Miss Morgan ventured an interruption:

"You legal men are so suspicious, that you are very apt to manufacture expressions for people's eyes."

"No. Her eyes are untrustworthy; and then when she spoke, I thought of cats, as I had done when she was creeping up on us from the garden, through the dark. Her words came with a sort of velvety purr, if you can imagine such a thing."

"I will try to, but go on."

"Miss Morgan lived here, did she not?" she purred.

"She did, I told her."

"Miss Eleanor Morgan was it not? the lady who had charge of William Staunton's daughter?"

"The same."

"She wished to see her."

"Miss Morgan or Miss Staunton?"

"Both eventually; just now, Miss Morgan."

"You were away, I then told her; could she not inform me what her business with you was?"

"Could I not, on the other hand, di-

rect her now to find you? Her business was of a delicate nature and she preferred confiding in one of her own sex."

"I could, if the character of her business warranted my so doing; without wishing to compel her confidence, I must know at least the nature of it."

"It was but the natural desire to see her darling daughter!"

"Her daughter!"

"Her daughter, Delphine Staunton," she repeated, so calmly and deliberately that, impostor though I believed her to be, I could only stare at her in wordless amazement. My confusion emboldened her; she stared back at me with those untrustworthy eyes, with what appeared to me the malicious triumph of a gambler who has just trumped his adversary's ace.

"I could think of but one thing to say: But Miss Staunton is an orphan, madame."

"So the poor darling has thought for a good while; I am come to prove the happy contrary to her."

"To prove?"

"To prove, monsieur." She purred in her accented English, for although she handles our language glibly, it is evidently an acquired accomplishment.

"Then, as I knew so little of William Staunton's affairs, I was forced to parley with her, instead of sending her to the right-about, as I so longed to do. I know next to nothing of Mr. Staunton's family relations. My sister is better informed; return here, Friday evening, and you can have an interview with Miss Morgan; upon which she bade me good evening, and stole out into the dark again, mumbling something about her servant at the gate. God knows I wish it might have been never to emerge from that darkness again."

Eleanor had spoken only once during this strange recital, the two miles intervening between the depot and their cottage was accomplished. As Max was assisting her from the carriage, she said, quite slowly, with the deliberation of conviction:

"Max! she is an impostor. There will be work for your lawyer's brains—for to you I shall entrust her detection."

"But the motive for the imposition?"

"Delphine is—"

"Rich," she was about to say—"and this impostor knows it;" but she remembered herself just in time to preserve

her promise of secrecy to the dead, so she substituted an echo of his own words: "God only knows."

"I expected it! she is here already," said Max, as they came within sound of the soft, treacherous foreign tongue.

She was talking to poor Evelyn, who, while listening politely, was wishing nervously that the carriage would come back with Max and Eleanor, and that Eleanor would be able to settle this horrid woman's business, coming there with her mystery and greasy silk-dress to disgrace their precious Delphine.

She cried out eagerly: "There they are now," at the first foot-fall on the verandah.

The foreigner stopped chattering and posed.

"My precious one," she cried rushing rapturously forward as Mr. Morgan's tall figure appeared within the parlor door, heralding, as she presumed, Delphine's appearance.

A cold-eyed stately woman gazed down upon her, petrifying her gushing intentions into the most ludicrous awkwardness.

One claw-like hand was promptly substituted for two extended arms.

Miss Morgan simply bowed, she had better employment for her own hands in unbuttoning her gloves.

"No Delphine! Oh! the disappointment! What have you done with my sweet baby?"

"Madame!" there was ice enough in Eleanor's voice to have frozen the words before she could utter them; "my brother has told me of the remarkable claim you have come here to urge. Permit me to say, I believe it to be a false one. Incontestable proof of your relationship must be given me, before I can allow my ward to be annoyed by your presence. Are you prepared to give such proof?"

"Lacerating as it is to a mother's feelings to hear her presence spoken of as an 'annoyance' to the babe she has nourished at her bosom, I shall for the present, Miss Morgan, put my own feelings of pride aside. Had I not been furnished with such proofs, noble lady, how vain my present errand! I do not resent your natural suspicion of me, had it been less, I should have doubted the sincerity of your interest in my sweet child. Are you ready to hear the whole melancholy story? I promise you it is

make clearest sunshine of what must now seem midnight mystery. It is a long story, and one harrowing to my feelings to relate. May I beg it may be for your ears alone?"

Perhaps it was the fear, for all her brave scepticism, that the woman's story might contain some slur upon the memory of the man who had filled her own heart so completely in the long ago, which made Eleanor consent readily to hear it in private.

She addressed her reply to her brother rather than to the petitioner.

"I believe I should prefer a private interview, Max. Rest assured you shall hear all that has any bearing on Delphine's welfare. I will know myself, first, what this (she hesitated just long enough to reject the word 'lady') individual has to say, in my own room."

"You doubt me!" was the first thing the individual had to say, when she found herself alone with Miss Morgan.

"I do." One would have thought that disbelief in all shabby genteel foreigners was an article of faith with Eleanor, so promptly and decidedly she said, "I do," in that clear ringing voice of her's.

"Naturally. Ah, my dearest Miss Morgan, you do not know how every indication of your sterling independence and lofty integrity of character appeals to the mother in my breast. I know my sweet child must have grown up under such guardianship into a brave, good girl. I thank you—I—"

But as Miss Morgan had not consented to this interview solely for the pleasure of hearing her effusive visitor gush, she coldly interrupted her.

"Confine yourself to your story, madame, I will excuse you from all personal comments, however flattering, until your right to make them is sufficiently established to divest them of impertinence. I am waiting anxiously for your promised proofs."

"Naturally," came once more with a gentle purr from the feline stranger's lips. Her amiable imperturbability was marvellous to witness.

Then by way of slipping her into the groove of narration: "Mr. Staunton's wife was a Frenchwoman, named Tricon," said Miss Morgan.

"Precisely; Celestine Tricon, born at Privas, in the Department of Ardèche, April 4th, 18—." The parish register of *Privas* could not have rendered a

more accurate account of that important event.

While giving her name, date of birth, and natal place, she had slipped off her glove and taken from the third finger of her left hand a well-worn gold ring.

"Please look at that;" she laid it upon Eleanor's lap.

Eleanor looked, and saw on the inside: "W. S. to C. T.; married, November 6th, 18—."

The date of William Staunton's marriage Eleanor Morgan knew by heart. This graven date tallied. "Well," she said handing it back into the claw-like hand, "that does not satisfy me."

"And at that." The stranger offered a locket, worn around her neck, attached to an exceedingly greasy ribbon, as her second proof. With fingers not quite steady Eleanor touched the spring. She knew very well what she was going to see. The case opened and William Staunton's face, not white and weary as she had last seen it, but bright and handsome as she loved best to remember it, looked up at her, with the laughing eyes and the careless droop of the dark moustache, that had so charmed her own girlish fancy. If she mistook not, this was the identical locket which he had brought as his first *gage d'amour*, when she had promised to be his wife, and which she had sent back when writing him word he must disprove certain reports before she could keep her promise.

He was proud and resentful and stood upon his dignity; she was proud and obstinate and stood upon her rights; so the breach widened and widened, until a great gulf yawned, across which they could no longer see each other, much less clasp pardoning hands, and the life currents which should have followed joyously together wandered farther and farther asunder, his growing foul and muddy, her's becoming stagnant—all for the want of three brave little words: "I was wrong."

Did all this surge through Eleanor's brain as she looked somewhat wistfully down on the bright face in the locket? Perhaps. For this time her voice sounded tired, as if it had been with her a long journey into the past since last heard.

"Very well, what more?"

"And at that." Her tormentor spread out upon her knee a time-creased paper.

It was proof third; a flawless certificate of marriage, between this shabby foreigner with the cowardly eyes and her own one-time lover so fastidious and elegant.

"Very well," she said again, struggling fiercely against conviction; "your three proofs are staggering but not incontestable. What proof have I that you are the rightful owner of that ring, that picture, or that certificate? Circumstantial evidence is all that you have so far offered."

Wounded pride, shocked sensibility, pained feeling, all struggled for place in the untrustworthy eyes, which rested reproachfully upon this unbelieving woman for a short second.

"The time will come, dear lady," and the purr threatened to degenerate into a wail, "when you will appreciate the effort it costs me not to display any resentment at your cruel suspicions. But I can be patient. Now, may I ask you one question only? Did William Staunton ever tell you that his wife was dead?"

The question was a telling one. It flashed upon Eleanor that he never had. Hold. Possibly the letter in her desk, upon which was written: "To be read only in case of trouble from abroad" might elucidate this matter. She had supposed it related to Delphine's money and had never given it a thought in all the peaceful years the orphan girl had been under her care. She half rose to bring this letter. Then sat down again. She would wait. She would hear all but tell nothing. She and Max would read that letter together, and take counsel over this trouble which was looming big for the darling of their hearts. A life-long habit of self-control stood her in good stead just now. It helped her to answer calmly: "In so many words, no, by inference, yes. But we are wasting time with this interchange of question and answer. Please put your story into concise form and let me hear it."

"With pleasure, my dear Miss Morgan. As this ring and this certificate of marriage have already informed you, I, Celestine Tricon, was married to William Staunton on the sixth day of November, 18—. Before I became acquainted with my glorious William, I had not thought to ever have loved anything mortal but my revered papa. Ah! such a noble, stately, distingué man,

was he. He was all the thing I had to love in the world. No mother, no sister, no brothers; nothing but father and I to make a world for each other. Then he brought William home with him one day, and I believe it was knowing how happy it would make my father, that first made me love my husband. We were married; then it was papa, William and I who filled the world; afterward came my baby girl, and the world was just as full as could be of loved ones and joy. Oh! how good the great God and my earthly father and William were to me; they kept a jealous guard over the very breezes that blew upon baby and me.

"At last God seemed to repent him of my great happiness. He wanted to remind me that he was all-powerful. He gave the devil guardianship of my lot. The devil's first commission was given to a fiend who had begged for my hand, and, coming from abroad to find me married, he waylaid and murdered the father who was more than all the world besides; it was my fault, you see. If I had not been in the world, he could not have loved me, and would not have killed the father who refused me to him. Then God in pity deprived me of the power to think, which had become so torturing. I went insane, is that as you would say?" She paused in her narrative with an inquiring look.

"You speak our language marvellously well," said Miss Morgan, somewhat sneeringly; "you need no assistance."

"Ah! thank you. So glad do you make me. Imagine a mother devoting a year to frantic endeavors to overcome all obstacles to communication with her own child, and my acquirement will cease to be marvellous. Moreover, my William almost made me speak his language."

"Go on, if you please."

"I went insane. And then I was happy. I thought no more of the murdered father, the lonely husband, the forlorn little baby at home. The asylum garden was my Eden, I was Eve regnant in it. There was but one trouble could come to me. And it came often at first, then ceased. My Eden had a serpent. It was a handsome, glossy, shining, creeping serpent, that would come to me, and try to coil itself about me. It looked at me with eyes like William's. I loathed it. I spurned it. It would creep nearer and nearer, and

til in my blind fury and terror I would lash at it and foam in my anguish.

"Then they would come about me and soothe, and tell me it was no serpent, but William, the husband I loved so well. I knew they lied, for the idea of William coming to me in the shape of a serpent! The serpent stayed away from me after awhile, and then I was a happy Eve with my beautiful garden all to myself."

"All of which, though possibly interesting in the extreme to the medical faculty, I will spare you the recital of."

"As you please, dear lady. I will go on, then, to my restoration. For more than three senselessly happy years I was an inmate of the asylum. Then I was pronounced well.

"My baby! William!" were the first sane words I spoke. There was but one familiar face about me. It was my cousin, Virginie Tricon, who had devoted her lonely life to my shattered one. She told me tenderly how I had driven William from me with jibes and curses, calling him serpent and other vile names; he had ceased visiting me because it was too agonizing to find himself an object of loathing to me. The physicians assured him that I could not recover. He had made arrangements for my maintenance, and had left for America.

"Then Monsieur Brousseau was sent for. Delphine's guardian, as you know. He came. Talked kindly and promised me that William should be back with me as soon as electricity and steam could bring him.

"From that instant I resumed my English studies. William had never allowed me to converse in any other language with him, desiring that our little daughter should from earliest childhood understand his and my native tongue equally well. But during my illness I had used only my own language.

"I went to a house in the country with my cousin, where I drank fresh milk, walked and studied English, so I would not seem like a stranger to my baby when they brought her.

"Monsieur Brousseau came again in two weeks' time. I saw his carriage at the gate. I was not sent for. I eavesdropped. I heard him tell my cousin that William was dead. Then, they had to take me back to the asylum once more. I was no happy Eve, this time. I

was a fawn, and the hunters were always in pursuit of me with hound and horn. My life was an agony.

"This hideous fancy wore itself away, too, and once more they called me well. To find my child was all I asked now. To America I must go. Monsieur Brousseau was good and kind. He gave me money from my allowance.

"Delphine is rich, but I am poor. I will never touch one cent of her money. No, though my poverty compels me to come before you thus shabby, I, who have never known a want ungratified. He placed me in the care of a New York family, about to return to their own country. They were kind people. I talked English incessantly with them. They heard my story and appreciated my dread of not being able to communicate with my own child. At least I am here, pining to clasp that precious form to a mother's breast—yearning to hear that sweet voice say 'mother.'"

She paused to wipe away the briny tears which impeded her vision.

Miss Morgan had listened with profound attention, eagerly watching for some flaw in the statement which might stamp this impostor; none occurred.

"You say you have a letter for me from Monsieur Brousseau?"

"I have a letter introducing me. But, dear lady, how will you be made to believe it genuine? You, whose candid eyes still say to me, I doubt you?"

"Monsieur Brousseau's style of composition and chirography are very peculiar. They would be hard to imitate."

"Precisely! His letters read like scraps from Victor Hugo. Jerkily, do they not?"

The comparison was so just that before taking the letter into her hand Eleanor was convinced that Monsieur Brousseau had written it. She read it. If it was not from Delphine's guardian, it would take a keener detective than herself to prove the forgery.

She rose to conclude the interview: "Madame, will you give me a day or two in which to consider all you have told me? There is too much at stake for unweighed words or hasty action."

Madame consented with the magnanimity of a victor, and took her departure, leaving Miss Morgan rebellious in soul, but convinced in reason

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGER AND SICK.

"The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Are scattered at the feet of man like flowers."
—Wordsworth.

Had Blucher been left to the devices and desires of his own heart he would have supped luxuriously off the Frenchman's calves. But "watch him" and "seize him" are orders of widely differing import to any well educated dog, and such Blucher prided himself upon being. He had been ordered to "watch him;" so he just planted himself squarely across the forest pathway, fixed his victim with his great blood-shot eyes, and "watched" him, with a vigilance absolutely agonizing to the object of it.

It was a study for the psychologist; the cringing terror, the wild anxiety in the face of the intellectual being—man; the calm determination and rugged serenity upon that of the inferior being—the brute.

The road by which the luckless human had entered this vale of horrors lay at his back. He would imitate the crafty cray-fish and proceed by receding. He would walk backwards, so slowly and softly that the dog should never be able to detect the motion. Fixing his eyes, full of terror, upon his jailer mastiff, he essayed the first backward step. Cautiously his right leg was stretched behind him to its utmost capacity, and the varnished boot pertaining thereto dropped noiselessly upon the grassy ground. Blucher advised him by a deep-throated growl not to attempt a second. In frantic haste, the left leg of the prisoner joined its adventurous fellow, resuming the motionless although somewhat tremulous position they had maintained ever since Delphine had issued her heartless commands.

Wearily heedful of the dog's advice, the prisoner stood still, sending an upward glance toward the trees once in awhile, either calculating the possibilities of climbing one, whose branches stretched tantalizingly just beyond his reach, or, maybe, praying for a deliverer. Then he would glance behind him, prepared to welcome a bottomless pit would the earth but yawn for his release. Again to the right and to the left he sends his searching glances, wondering vaguely if the whole population of this strange country is included in a vixenish

young lady and a spiteful dog. But nothing appeared to solve his doubts or ease his torment. The emerald velvet branches of the trees closed around him and about him on every side, like beautiful allies of his brute enemy, determined that through them no egress should he find.

He was sick, weary, consumed by fever. It would at least be some mitigation of his discomfort if he could lie down at the root of a tree. This time it was the cunning of the serpent he would emulate. He would wriggle into a recumbent posture. Blucher informed him, by a growl deeper-throated and more prolonged than the first, wriggling was as objectionable as running, and that nothing but absolute quietness would satisfy the demands of justice. A supplementary bark informed him, further, that if he consulted his truest interests he would cease all futile efforts at escape.

Although Blucher was a native born citizen of America, and growled in the purest English, it was astonishing how much more felicitous he was in making himself understood than were his two book-assisted betters. The dog understood the foreigner, and the foreigner understood the dog without a shadow of difficulty, whereas the dog's mistress and the Frenchman had failed ingloriously. What an intellectual triumph!

The shades of night were rapidly rendering objects at a distance undiscernible, when close at hand loomed a massive figure, hurrying forward with tremendous strides. It was Sergeant Danbury, late and anxious.

A shout of distress from the imprisoned Frenchman, a vivacious bark of recognition from Blucher, and he stood upon the scene of action.

Generally speaking, Sergeant Danbury was not what you would call a quick man, but, coming into the woods on his way to bring the little lady home later (by reason of those "bothersome trees") than he should have been, and anxious, as his foolish heart always was about that wonderfully precious piece of mortality, seeing the dog, who had been sent with her, without her (and never had he known Blucher to desert a charge); seeing a breeched, coated and moustachioed thing, standing there, where he certainly did not belong, with his hands clasped about the white

which the little lady had flung with such saucy defiance about her pretty head, when telling him boldly she would go through these very woods, all looked darkly suspicious; and the fierce anxiety at his honest heart spurred stolid Dan into a quickness of motion and of utterance utterly foreign to his nature.

"Where's the child?" he shouted, rather than asked, as with a bound he stood towering over the quaking foreigner, whose secret conviction that this country was not the abode of civilization must have been sensibly increased by the blazing wrath in the face of this new enemy.

The new-comer's words were meaningless, his looks were portentous. Politeness was a powerful weapon where he came from. He would employ it to exorcise this demon before him, thought the Frenchman: "Bienvenu! Monsieur, Bienvenu!" he cried, as airily as fright and weariness would permit.

"D—n your foreign gibberish, what are you doing with that scarf (seizing it savagely)? Where's her it belongs to? Curse you, Blucher, is this the way you take care of your mistress? Where is she, brute! You're generally good enough at answering questions after your own fashion; where's this cursed Frenchman hidden her at? show her! Fetch her, brute! fetch her!"

Blucher eyed the excited Sergeant knowingly; glanced down the road then back at the Frenchman. I think he wanted to say: Calm yourself, she's all right; attend to the prisoner, here all the honor lies.

But Dan was too excited to translate Blucher with his usual happy success, so he glowered back to the Frenchman.

"Monsieur," said that sufferer, smiling with the heroism of a staked martyr, "Je vous embrace a bras ouverts."

"Who!"

"Monsieur, je suis malade."

"See here! By the good God above us, if you don't find some way of answering my questions I'll pound you into a jelly. See here, young lady," (flaunting the boa wildly in the foreigner's face by way of indicating a female presence).

"Young lady," wrapping it about his big shoulders to increase the pantomimic delusion. "Young lady! where? and Dan pointed frantically with both *outstretched hands to the four cardinal*

points as if questioning space as to the whereabouts of his wayward idol.

The Frenchman gazed fixedly at the old soldier, desperately manipulating the boa, to the imminent risk of the flimsy texture. He followed with solemn attention the northward, southward, eastward, and westward movement of his ten fleshly interrogation points, then mentally revised his first impression of the country. It was a lunatic instead of a barbarous people, among which a malicious fate had cast him. Lunatics were to be soothed, not exhorted.

"Mon pauvre! Laissez tranquille! Que voulez? D'on venez-vous?" his voice was a very lullaby. Further parley was worse than useless. There stood this moustachioed thing in possession of Delphine's boa. There stood Blucher, looking and acting more senselessly than ever he had looked or acted before! There was not the little lady! where was she? It was plain palpable villany. This villain wandering through the woods had me the beautiful darliug; he had, had—thought became insupportable! inaction, suffocation!

(A parenthetic plea for Sergeant Danbury. The "Children of the Abbey," and the "Mysteries of Udolpho" and "Somebody on Landscape Gardening" were all the books he studied.

A huge fist was suddenly insinuated inside the white embroidered necktie encircling tee slender neck of th foreigne.

"Speak!" roared the Sergeant, making speaking a physical impossibility, as he twisted the cravat until the purple of the visage above it contrasted brilliantly with its pure whiteness. His victim complied with the unreasonable request by a gurgle and a choking splutter.

"Speak!" his captor roared again, twisting him on to his tip-toes, "The little lady! What have you done with her?"

Great drops stood out upon the Frenchman's purple brow like diamonds in an amethyst setting, but he only kept gurgling on in a jerky fashion, like a brook over rocky impediments.

"You won't speak won't you?" and with emphatic precision the Sergeant brought his stout walking cane across the spotless linen coat, loosening at the same instant his hold upon the throat of his victim.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" gasped the frightened wretch, glaring half-crazed about him.

"Where is the little lady?" With every stroke of the cane the interrogation was repeated in louder and quicker tones, Blucher accompanying each blow with a ringing bark of approval, until the woods fairly resounded with, "little lady! little lady!"

"Dan!"

Above the din of blows, barks and gasping expostulation came that monosyllable clear silvery, imperious.

With a shout of gladness Sergeant Danbury dropped his upraised stick and cried aloud:

"Thank God," flinging his victim aside with a careless thrust, the little lady was safe, what else mattered?

With a groan and a muttered

"Mon Dieu! Quelle campagne!" the Frenchman fell swooning at the feet of his tormentors.

"Dan! Dan! what have you done?"

Delphine sprang forward full of fright and remorse, for somehow she felt blameworthy; she stooped in helpless pity over the fallen man. Close after her came conscience-stricken Dan, lifting the head of the stranger, he laid it tenderly against his shoulders, then the minister, wondering and pitiful, and Blucher sniffing gravely at his fallen foe, completed the group about him.

In his haste to escort Delphine through the woods the minister, after seeing his mother inside her own gate, had hurried back to the church. Thus it happened that the vinaigrette which he always carried for that carefully-tended parent, was still in his possession. He hastened to apply the restorative.

Nothing broke the solemn quiet of the waiting group until Dan, upon whose tender soul remorse was a heavy and unwonted weight, began stuttering out all his anxiety, his fears and his unjust treatment of the man who lay there so still and white, utterly unconscious how full of pity were the faces of his late persecutors.

"You foolish, foolish Dan," said Delphine, never taking her eyes off the pale face before them. "He's coming to," she said presently; very softly, as if fearful of frightening him back into unconsciousness.

The foreigner's eyes opened languidly. They opened upon the holy face of Harris Samuels. Had an angel come down to release him from those demons who

had been tormenting him? He believed one had.

"Vous parlez français!" It was a plea not a question.

Happily, Mr. Samuels did.

Oh! the joy that little "yes" carried with it.

Then he told the tender-eyed minister, speaking rapidly and gesticulating with animation, how he had lost his way, how he had been feeling as if fever-stricken all day; how he had met the young lady and begged her to tell him where he could find shelter for the night; how everybody had misunderstood and maltreated him; how he did not know what to do, nor where to go. All of which the minister put into good English for the benefit of Delphine and Sergeant Danbury, adding that he would take the stranger back to his own house.

But Delphine pleaded for an opportunity to make the amende honorable by taking him to her home to be nursed well, and remorseful Dan added his petition to hers, asking the minister to tell the French gentleman how sorry he was for having given him such an un-called-for thrashing.

All of which the minister put into good French for the benefit of the foreigner. Pardoning hands were clasped all around, and the Frenchman soon rose to his feet, declaring that he believed half his malady had been ce bête terrible, for Blucher was not included in the general amnesty.

So the minister, whose heart was much roomier than his home, consented to relinquish his hospitable intentions in favor of the Staunton house, and the whole party was put in motion in that direction, as amicable and merry as a party of returning pick-nickers. Only Blucher seemed to think that the dignity of the family had not been properly sustained, and stalked majestically apart. For which the stranger found it easy in his heart to forgive him, not feeling quite tranquil about his calves yet.

In a fine fright at their prolonged absence, they found Mother Danbury pacing the length of the terrace to and fro, peering out with dim and spectacled eyes, into the thickening darkness, when with the aid of the best sunlight, she could just see comfortably a foot or two beyond her own nose.

In a fine rage, they threw her when they reached home, with not even

much as a scratch to compensate her for her anxiety of soul, bringing with them a "French tramp," as she promptly christened the stranger, to give her "more work to do, that had more than ten men could attend to now."

"But he is a stranger, Mother Dan, and ye must take him in."

"And be took in by him, for thanks."

"And he is sick, Mother Dan, and ye must minister to him."

"I never set up for hospital nurse for foreign tramps, child, though there's none more ready than Salina Danbury to obey Bible teachings," and she hustled off to see a bed prepared.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNPROVEN LIE.

"I am for fumigating the atmosphere, when I suspect that falsehood, like pestilence, breathes around me."—*Carlyle*.

"A mystery!" Max almost groaned the word out, so hateful did it seem to him to have anything bordering upon the mysterious or unaccountable coming into their crystalline lives, a dark secret coming to hide itself in the home where the sunlight of truth and sincerity had access to every nook and crevice.

Maxwell Morgan was proud, with the pride not of the born or manufactured aristocrat, whose money will bridge every chasm, clothe every skeleton, but with the pride of a brave, strong-hearted man, who, inheriting an honest and unstained name, keeps it honest and unstained, and cares not to have anything defiling come too near its possessors. This suspicious woman, with her suspicious story, was the nearest approach to the disreputable that had ever come into his life. He wished he could fling her aside as he had flung other noxious things out of his pathway, but he could not, so he only uttered that groaning protest.

Eleanor had come straight from her interview with the strange woman, and repeated accurately every word that had passed between them, to Max. How she hoped that the lawyer, with his cooler head and professional acumen, might detect some weak point in the story, where she, with her woman's excitability and *that strange tugging at her heart-strings, which warped her judgment while she*

looked at that face in the picture, had been unable to discover.

Max had listened very attentively, had asked as many questions as if cross-examining a witness, had sat combing his thick hair back from his splendid forehead with nervous fingers, had looked up at her with gravely-troubled eyes, and found, after all his thinking, nothing more consolatory to say than, "A mystery!"

"Max, do you believe that this woman, with the mean face and coward's eyes is the mother of our brave-eyed Delphine?"

"It is hard to say 'Yes,' and yet how can I say 'No?'"

"Maybe," said Evelyn, the sweet saint who tried to find some good thing in everything which bore the mark of the Great Maker, and who pitied when she could not praise; "maybe her eyes were not cowardly eyes before her trouble, and maybe the terror of that time stamped the meanness on her face."

"Perhaps," said Miss Morgan, absently.

"Has Monsieur Brousseau ever made any allusion to this matter in his letters, Eleanor? It seems strange that he should not."

"Remember, brother, that M. Brousseau's letters have always been the most formal business communications, containing the stereotyped announcement that: 'Enclosed I would please find quarterly remittance for benefit of Mademoiselle Delphine Staunton,' with the usual expression of hope that his ward continued in the enjoyment of good health; stop, let me look. I remember now, and it must have been just about the time this—she started from France—one of his letters contained a postscript which puzzled me at the time, but seemed of no manner of importance. I will bring that letter."

From the systematically filed letters of the trustees, it was easy to extract the one she wanted. She read it out to Max and Evelyn:

"Allow me to tender my congratulations to my esteemed young ward upon her recent happy acquisition."

It had been a riddle when read, but of no importance—it was no riddle now, but significant enough.

Then the three who loved Delphine, looked sorrowfully at each other, thinking, all of them, of the shabby woman in the greasy silk dress.

"Happy acquisition!" ejaculated

Max, with biting scorn. "You said something about a letter from Mr. Staunton," he resumed more mildly; "to be read in case of trouble from abroad. The time to read it has come, I think."

"The trouble certainly has," Eleanor answered, getting up to bring the letter, but she had no hope left that it would help them any. She was sure it was going to be a silent witness on the side of this cat-like woman.

"Read it Max," she said in a hopeless sort of voice, "it is for us all to hear."

Max read:

"MY DEAR FRIENDS: I have not told you all that concerns my child's welfare. I must write what I was not brave enough to look you in the face and speak. Delphine's mother is not dead. When I married Celestine Tricon—the only child of a retired army officer (with whom I had formed a fast friendship before meeting his daughter), the two were completely bound up in each other. Motherless as she was, all her pent-up filial devotion was centred in her stately, soldierly father. She was his all, as he was hers. He cordially sanctioned my marriage with his daughter, a piquante little beauty, full of heart and tenderness, and until after the birth of our little girl, our small family circle was a very happy one. Delphine was in her third year, when my poor Celestine was crushed to the earth by the shocking murder of the father she loved so well; the horror of the deed being augmented, when his murderer was discovered to have been a suitor for her hand, one her father had scornfully rejected, who, upon returning from abroad to find her married, had vented his disappointed passion in the base murder of an old man.

Brooding over her loss, fancying herself in some way responsible for it, it soon became evident to me that my wife's mind was suffering from some inconsolable grief. I called in physicians who confirmed my terrible suspicions. I did everything that mortal man could do available to ward off the horrible fate of insanity from poor Celestine. I travelled with her; I indulged her every whim; I sought distraction for her in every form. It was all useless. The mind failed completely. Then I sent for the only relative she had living, a young lady cousin with whom she had been cradled and reared, and placed her at the head of my household, in charge of my forlorn little child and unfortunate wife. It soon became necessary to remove Celestine to an asylum; I did it reluctantly, but deemed it best her child should not have such a picture of horror before her eyes as her only recollections of her mother. From having

been her idol, I became the object of her fiercest hatred and detestation. The sight of me lashed her into the wildest fury, so much so, that I was compelled to cease visiting her. After being assured by the physicians that her case was entirely hopeless, France became hateful to me and I returned here—enfeebled in body, weary of life. Before leaving France I installed her cousin, a lonely woman, with no ties to make the duty onerous, in charge of my wife, providing amply for their maintenance, and so arranged my financial matters that in case I never returned, there should be no trouble about my child's fortune. Everything I die possessed of is settled upon Delphine, with the pitiful reservation of her poor mother's allowance and a life annuity to the faithful cousin who has charge of her. It has appeared to me best that my girl's life should not be darkened by the knowledge of her mother's gloomy lot, and that, as she is dead to her, Delphine shall remain under the impression that the grave has closed over her mother. Even to you I have not thought it necessary to bare this hidden sore, and it is only to prevent possible trouble in the future that I do so now. Although repeatedly assured, by a council of the best physicians, that my poor wife would never leave the asylum but for her grave, time works miracles and it is possible that she may recover. In that case, of course, she will immediately join her child. You will see her. You will come to know what manner of woman took pity upon the man you so scornfully cast from you. You *will not* like her. But no matter, for the little one's sake be kind to her. For the coming of her mother *must not* deprive her of you. I believe I have said all I need to say. I hope this letter contains no disloyalty to the poor wife languishing in the insane asylum."

Dismay and conviction was written legibly on the faces of the three listening to that letter.

"Poor dear Delphine!" Evelyn's voice was almost a sob.

"Time works miracles," Mr. Staunton very truly says. Will it ever work the miracle of inspiring such a daughter with love for such a mother?"

Was ever such wealth of comment crowded into those two little words as Max crowded into those bitterly emphasized "such's."

"It never will," said Evelyn, stoutly. But Miss Morgan seemed stricken dumb. She sat there quietly folding up the two letters which had established this woman's claims, but neither expressed an opinion nor answered a question.

She looked at Max furtively once or twice, with such a queer look, as if, for

some reason best known to herself; she felt sorry for *him* too.

Presently she got up and went away to her own bed-room, from which she did not emerge again until the next morning.

Never before had the spirit of unrest taken up its abode unchidden under the peaceful roof of the Morgan family, but that night it reigned supreme.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOREIGNER EXPLAINED.

"What writest thou?" The vision raised its head, And, with a look made of all sweet accord, Answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'

'And is mine one?' said Abou. 'Nay, not so,' Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low, But cheerily still; and said, 'I pray thee, then Write me as one that loves his fellow-men.'"

—*Leigh Hunt.*

A painter in search of typical models for Sunshine and Shadow could not have done better than to have taken his paint-pots and brushes and the Wickam and Ballston Railroad as far as the Lodge to which Paul Weyland had gone, accompanied by his cousin Augustus Ames, each in pursuit of that *ignis fatuus*, happiness; an eternal pursuit in which they but joined a world full of planning men and yearning women—gentle folk and simple folk, the laboring many and the resting few.

Temporarily, Paul's happiness consisted in catching fish and shooting birds. A murderous order of felicity, dependent on misery and pain for its very existence; but it was positive.

On the contrary, his cousin's lay simply in the absence of pain. It was negative in its character. He was not rudely aroused from the sleep so precious to his sluggish nature, with an imperative summons to prayers when his heart was far fuller of cursing. He was not ordered into the ranks of tuneless worshippers, three times a day, on the laborious day of rest. He was not hourly condemned to quail until he felt all the manhood in him scorching in the fierce fires of self-contempt under the basilisk eye paternal.

The happiness born of pain was keen, hearty, invigorating. That springing from its mere absence was languid, feeble, placid. Analyze, ye metaphysicians!

The Judge's son cannot be better described than by calling him "Sunshiny."

Sunshine nestled in the bright rings of nut brown hair that clung caressingly about his fine broad forehead. It laughed in the merry blue eyes that had a kindly glance for every deserving fellow creature. The sunshine of happy youth was in his heart, and the sunshine of good fortune had brightened his life-way. He was not ungrateful for this sunny lot, though, maybe, not grateful in an orthodox fashion. His gratitude took the form of generous, manly, helpful sympathy toward all the less fortunate. Had he prayed it would have been the prayer of Abou Ben Adhem:

"I pray thee, then,

Write me as one who loves his fellow-men."

In particular did he pity, with that pity which is akin to love, his cousinly counterpart, the model for shadow. I think a jury of romantic young ladies would have hung on the respective titles of those two young men to be called "handsomest." The shadowy depths of Mr. Ames's great black eyes, the listless grace of his tall, slender form, the wavy black hair that tumbled over his brow and staid there for lack of energy on its owner's part to adjust it properly, looked "so romantic, so melancholy—" his beauty was of that sort which most readily appeals to the tender sympathies of very young ladies.

But Paul was not a romantic young lady; even taking his sex into consideration he was singularly free from any sentimentalism. He was essentially a healthy nature; physically, morally and mentally. He would have liked above all things to have taken a pair of good sharp shears and shorn those wavy black locks that had such a romantic trick of tumbling about Augustus's forehead, to a sensible shortness, just to have given some fresh air to the brooding brain beneath them. He wanted to chase the gloomy look away from the large eyes which gazed out upon this bright, happy world, without seeing either its brightness, or its opportunities for happiness.

He would have liked to have shaken the moral nature of the man into a brisker existence, to make him a little less "like dumb, driven cattle." He would have liked to shear him of his superfluous locks and rid him of his dreary philosophy at one brisk *coup de main*, which was Paul's favorite style of accom-

gall ends. But he was too finish-
gentleman to fall into the good peo-
ror of confounding sympathy
mpertinence. So he treated his
s dreary philosophy with all ap-
respect, and left his locks undis-
in their hyacinthine flow.

s so easy for you, Paul," Augus-
uld say, whenever a subject came
which the healthy, breezy philos-
f the one threatened to clash with
ical moralizing of the other, "It
sy for you, Paul, who are rich"—
Paul, ever ready to mete out
us allowance for the difficulties
mptations of others, would won-
little sadly, perhaps, if he owed
good that was in him, all his love
beautiful in the moral as well as
ural world, all his bright dreams
ing a great and good man of one
Neyland, to his father's money

ly, should avarice be apotheo-
to the noblest of virtues, if wealth
alt a man in soul, gird him in ef-
pand him in brain.

early hours of Alma Mater regu-
still exerted their influence on
ently emancipated student. Five
always found Paul astir with gun
ng-rod.

y saturated with the freshness of
ruing, he would bound into Au-
s room on his return, lay a glitter-
aly perch upon his hot cheek,
he well filled game bag over his
and finally torment him into a sit-
sture.

atter-of-course had all sorts of re-
become that Augustus paid but
eed when Paul, evidently under
resure of excitement, bounded in-
room one morning, proclaimed the
the day in reproachful tones, and
ned him to rise without longer

at's up?" asked Augustus, sleep-

stty much everything but your
zy self."

pe or trout?"

ws!"

at! Eh! News? Did you shoot
hook 'em?"

ike up, Gus! There is a minister
Sergeant Danbury downstairs."

what!" Gus dreamily fancied the
seable possibility that coercive
ras to come into vogue in their

blessed retreat, and the Sergeant must
have come along to compel attendance
on the minister.

"Yes," Paul resumed vivaciously, "a
soldier of the Cross and one of the Devil
(if he is general-in-chief of the earthly
corps), both come to breakfast with us."

"What for?"

"Because they are an hungered, most
likely."

By this time Augustus was wide awake
and curious enough.

"What in the deuce do you mean,
Paul?"

"Just this: it seems our pretty Cousin
Della is rustivating at the homestead,
and in her wanderings through the
woods the other evening, she stumbled
on a sick Frenchman, and had him taken
home to be nursed well. But it
seems again he grew worse rapidly, so
the preacher searched the sick man's
pockets for some clue to his friends, and
curiously enough, the only paper he
found was a letter of introduction to me;
also, a card on which the Judge had
written directions for him, by which he
could find me, together with a few lines
explaining how the young man had come
to Wickam with this letter, and had
seemed keenly disappointed at not find-
ing me and unwilling to await my re-
turn."

"Well! what does the letter of intro-
duction say?"

"Here it is. It is from Ned Brinslow,
dear old fellow; you've heard me speak
of him. He's supplementing Harvard
with Paris. Gad, old chum! I'd like to
touch hands."

"Don't gush, read."

"DEAR PAUL: This letter will be hand-
ed to you by young M Emile Girardeau,
who proposes trying to amend his broken
fortunes in America, the blessed asylum
of the bankrupt. His relatives (to whom
I brought letters), have been good and
kind to me in the extreme, and any at-
tention you can show him I will regard
as a personal favor.

"Yours in the spirit,

"N. BRINSLOW."

"We'll ride back with the two soldiers
and get him."

"What ails the fellow?" asked Au-
gustus cautiously.

"How can I tell? But, if it is conflu-
ent small-pox, here is where he be-
longs."

"By George! we're running a great risk."

"Well! we won't borrow trouble, at least not of the confluent small-pox kind. Will you ride over to the homestead with me?"

Augustus weighed the small-pox possibilities against the lonesome reality, if Paul should go without him, and said "Yes."

So after regaling the two soldiers on the best his bachelor establishment could furnish, Paul ordered round his own trap, and making the more sociable arrangement of putting the Sergeant with Augustus, and the minister with himself, they all started for the homestead.

The six miles which lay between the two places were quickly traversed, not so quickly, however, but that Paul had time to yield to the gentle fascinations which Harris Samuels unwittingly exercised over all with whom he came in contact. It was the fascination of manly earnestness, kindly sympathy and sincere expression, which constituted the charm as well as the power of this faithful servant of the Lord.

Had Paul and he been old college mates they could not have occupied the time of their dinner in livelier or more enjoyable converse.

Delphine met them at the hall door—"Bright, fresh and looking sweet enough to eat"—as Paul informed her while availing himself of his cousinly privileges to the extent of two hearty kisses. After greeting the others of the party, Delphine drew Paul away from them.

"Brush your hair, you barbarian, and come into the sitting-room looking your handsomest. I've something in there you'll feel like eating, sure enough."

"What, your sick Frenchman?" asked Paul, obeying her first injunction by combing his curly hair with his fingers, in front of the hat-rack mirror.

"No, hush! don't speak so loud. Oh! Paul," and she tip-toed to whisper the solemn secret in his ear: "I've got a wife here for you!"

"A wife!"

"Yes, a wife!"

"Who told you I wanted one, Miss?"

"Why of course you want one; all men want wives, and it's only those that no woman will have who say they don't want them."

"But, Del—if I have to marry—I would rather marry you."

"But, Paul, the inclination is all on your side; I'd rather not marry you, thank you; I wouldn't have any coz to love and tease me, then."

"There's Gus, we might adopt him into the family."

"He's too tombstory."

"But to return to my wife. Is mother Danbury on the anxious bench?"

"Yes, but not about you. She's wild to get my French tramp, as she calls the poor little fellow up stairs, about his business."

"I am here to gratify her most natural desire."

"Well, we'll talk about him, presently. But now let me tell you about the angel that's been coming here to help take care of him; and oh, Paul, please fall in love with her and marry her."

"I suppose my falling in love is all that is necessary; small blame to me if between a certain mother in Wickam and a certain cousin not so far away, I turn out a model of conceited jackanapism."

As Delphine looked into the handsome face of the cousin she loved so well and took such pride in, she did not believe many girls—not related, of course—could resist him.

"Well; just promise me you'll fall in love and my plan will take care of itself."

"I do, hereby, most solemnly promise and declare—"

"Hush!"

The sweetest of voices suddenly floated through the sitting-room window out to them, where they stood upon the terrace.

Not a word passed between the cousins while Lucy Samuels was singing her short, sweet ballad.

"I thought young ladies were a species of nightingale," said Paul, after expressing his sincere satisfaction at the sweetness of the voice and song, "who reserved their melodies for evenings, lamp-light and beaux."

"This one does not. She is more of a lark. She comes over every morning, and will sit there and sing for that sick man, until his face looks as calm and happy as a baby's."

"Who is your lark?"

"Lucy Samuels, sister to the minister you rode over with. Oh, Paul, she is just an angel, and she is the one I want you to fall in love with."

"I'll do my very best, coz. But what if I fail?"

"You cannot fail."

"I don't know, success in failure is very common."

"But you're going to marry her and make me happy. Now come, I'll take you to see your Frenchman. I just wanted to prepare you to look and act your best for Miss Samuels. She is an angel, Paul, indeed she is."

"But suppose I tell you I'm not partial to angels?"

"Oh, I don't mean one of your milk-faced, butter-voiced—"

"Cheese-headed, let's have all the airy products—"

"Angels—but a pretty, merry, useful, brisk, sensible little angel, that can make light bread as well as she can sing, and can feed chickens and make butter and read good books and talk theology, just as occasion calls for each."

"I like novelties, and, as a chicken-feeding angel is decidedly such, I think it will not be difficult to gratify your simple request in the matrimonial arrangement."

"You laugh now, but—"

"But what? I'll weep when I get over?"

"There, now, she has left the piano; we will go in. Turn around and let me look at you."

Paul stood as motionless as if on dress parade, while Delphine's big brown eyes scanned him carefully:

"Boots might be a little shinier, a little smarter hat would do no harm, but pass on; as long as you're addicted to bachelor housekeeping something must be overlooked."

With this doubtful endorsement Paul was led forward to be introduced to the ubiquitous angel who could talk theology, or make butter, or feed chickens, or sing ballads, as occasion called for.

CHAPTER XII.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

"That I made virtue of necessity,
And took it well."—*Chaucer.*

"Too much at stake," Miss Morgan had said to the woman who laid claim to their darling, "for unweighed words or hasty action."

But after every word spoken had been weighed, after the maturest delibera-

tion upon action to be taken, what nearer were they, she and Max, the two who loved Delphine so well, to a satisfying course?

The most unobservant of mortals, coming upon the Morgans the morning after the stranger's visit, would have seen that a cloud had settled down upon this serene little household.

"I shall call in at Judge Weyland's office, on my way down town, and lay this remarkable affair before him. He is clear-brained and long-sighted, and—" Max did not seem to think it worth while to finish his sentence. "And he is a disinterested party," was what he was thinking.

"And I had better go to the Parsonage with the news," Eleanor added.

"I had rather perform my task than yours," said Max, thinking, with pity for Eleanor, of the minister's cold eyes and ungracious demeanor.

So they both went their separate ways about Delphine's business. Surely if in multitude of counsel there is wisdom, Delphine Staunton was in a fair way to be wisely cared for.

There was a heartiness of manner about Judge Weyland, a warmth of welcome in eye, hand and voice, that put one in a good humor with oneself by giving him the comfortable sensation that, of all men, he was the man most desirable to see at that particular moment. In consequence of which the majority of visitors were seen at their best in the Judge's presence.

Max liked this clear-headed, hearty-mannered Judge, worldling though he was. He liked his big brain, his daring reasoning and his bold utterances. Although unable cordially to endorse all his liberal theories of the Creator and the created, he agreed with him in claiming for every man the important privilege of doing his own thinking, and the manly privilege of acting in accordance with the convictions resulting from that thinking.

An earnest thinker, a clear reasoner, a pure moralist himself, he did not fall into the popular error of confounding religion and morality.

Judge Weyland was an irreligious man and a moral gentleman. Above all, whatever he was, he was in reality and not in seeming. For the sincerity of his convictions and the consistency of his life, Maxwell Morgan liked him.

He stepped in, as he had said he should, to see this clear-headed uncle of Delphine's to tell him about the French claimant, and see if he could detect any weak point in the story which might assist him to prove the whole business an imposture.

"The devil!" exclaimed the Judge, calling promptly upon his patron, as Max put a period to his recital.

"What do you think of it all?"

"Patience! my dear fellow. I do not believe I have begun to think of it at all yet; my thinking apparatus has been jostled so completely out of gear by the liveliest surprise."

"It will crush that proud child to the earth. I have heard her say she could imagine no greater pain than to have to blush for one's own blood."

"Tut, man! William Staunton was a sad dog, but a true-hearted gentleman, and nothing can ever convince me he would have married a woman we cannot afford to recognize. Her troubles, perhaps, have made her look seedy and rusty. Take the woman's greasy silk dress off her, and let Mrs. Judge lend a hand in rigging her afresh before Delph sees her, and, maybe, all necessity for that painful blushing will be obviated."

"Do you mean that all the coarseness of the woman lies in the grease spots on her dress?"

"Not just exactly that, my dear boy, but not being a married man yourself, it is utterly impossible for you to conceive how largely dress does enter into the composition of the woman."

"What would Mrs. Judge say to that?"

"She would call me a 'libellous wretch,' which would in no wise vitiate my assertion."

"But—" Max's voice implied impatience with himself for having departed for a second from the matter in hand—"you seem to take this woman's claim for granted, and are preparing for her immediate adoption into the family."

"Not at all, not at all. What I suggest was only by way of showing you how, if the thing did turn out inevitable, we might mend matters a little. I shall do my legal best to pick a flaw in the statement. And nothing would afford me keener pleasure than to inform the so-called Mrs. Staunton that her only chance of being accommodated in this neighborhood would be at the *expense of the county.*"

"But how are we to go about proving her identity?"

"You say your sister is ready to vouch for the authenticity of Brousseau's introduction?"

"She is. The most careful criticism of style and of the formation of letter, has failed to cast any doubt on its genuineness."

"And William's letter was written in preparation for this contingency?"

"It was written with no other motive."

"Her statement, you say, tallies in every respect with that in Staunton's letter?"

"To the most trifling circumstance."

"There is but one course, Mr. Morgan. If this woman can be placed in the category, she will accede to our terms. We must write to M. Brousseau, sending back the letter she has presented, asking if it is genuine; requesting him to write us all he knows about the matter; also, get him to send out a photograph of William's wife."

"What you suggest I did on the first visit after her first visit."

"Then there is nothing left to do but to wait for his answer, warding off a collision between her and the child until it comes."

"And then?"—Max ground his teeth together.

"And then, Morgan, if the facts substantiate this woman's claim, as it will be on the child, the truth must be told her. I will tell it myself. And we must all, by courtesy, show kindness to the mother, try to enter her into the respect of the daughter."

"Spoken kindly, Judge, but remember if ever Delphine Staunton respects this woman, it will have to be through some at present unsuspected merit in herself. You do not know the child as I do. In her own gentle way she is as independent in thought and action as yourself. She would appreciate our courtesy to this mother of hers just what it was worth; thank you for the motive, which she will understand as clearly as if she had heard the words you have just spoken, by thanking us for trying to hoodwink her."

"Well, we won't trouble about that just yet," with which they parted.

While her brother was in consultation with Judge Weyland, Eleanor was folding her story in the presence of

Rev. St. John Ames, Mrs. Ames and Miss Susie Ames.

A profound silence followed her closing sentence. The minister's family was altogether too well trained to express any opinions until his dictum had gone forth as a basis for their formation, and he seemed disposed on this occasion to be very deliberate in his utterances.

At last the gray eyes, harsh and cold, fastening upon the gentle face of the wife for a focus, gave emphasis to the dictum—harsh and cold, too:

"William Staunton was the source of mental disquietude to his family during the whole of his reckless career, and this new vexation for which we are indebted to him, would lead one to conclude that the wicked do not cease from troubling when the grave receives them."

"Oh, Mr. Ames, poor, dead William!"

"Dead, it is true, Maria. Nor would I make one unjust assertion against him, dead or alive. The fact of his death, however, does not alter the fact of his irregular and blameworthy life."

"But he was an elegant gentleman to the end, poor fellow."

"Elegant gentlemen are frequently first-class scamps. I think, moreover Maria, that the apologist of an evil-doer is, in certain degree, an evil-doer also."

This by way of extinguishing Maria.

"Such a disgrace to the family, mamma!" sighed Miss Ames. "And you say she dresses shabbily, Miss Morgan, and looks coarse?"

"She will not reflect credit upon the family"—very coldly—"but the effect of her coming upon Delphine's whole future life is surely the most important consideration."

"Certainly! oh, of course, certainly! But then, you know, one hates a scandal. And people will think it so strange."

"A Frenchwoman, and, of course, a Papist!" The clergyman glowered at Miss Morgan, as if casting the whole blame of this woman's existence, nationality and Romanistic tendencies upon her unoffending shoulders.

"I presume so."

"It is a very terrible piece of business, look at it how you may," the minister's wife moaned. "If the poor woman only was not a Romanist, and did not wear a greasy silk dress—a nice calico would be much more respectable—it would be easier to reconcile oneself."

"Maria!"

"Yes, Mr. Ames."

"You are a very good woman, a most excellent good woman, but I hope your goodness of heart will not carry you to the extent of opening your arms to a foreign Papist, for the insufficient reason that she married into the family. The fact of her being your brother's wife in no way lessens her heresy. And it is doing the Church but lukewarm service to clasp hands with her revilers and persecutors."

"Oh, Mr. Ames, you must know that every desire of my heart is to glorify God by exalting His Church upon earth. I was only anxious for dear niece's sake to do the proper thing by her mother. But of course you are the best judge."

"If you are so anxious to do the proper thing, my dear, I would suggest the careful perusal of certain epistles which recommend wifely submission as a most praiseworthy virtue."

(Poor Mrs. Ames! as if she had not almost read those pale eyes sightless over that same Book, which demands perfection of sinful mortality as the price of that peace to which she was surely entitled by the law of compensation.)

"Certainly, Mr. Ames; I always try to comply with your wishes, only—"

"Only" we will not, my dear, give any countenance to this foreign heretic."

"Is there no hope, Miss Morgan, that she may be proven an impostor?" Miss Ames's voice was querulous from excess of anxiety. "You know people will talk."

"I have no hope. Her oral statement and Mr. Staunton's written one corroborate each other so perfectly, and the letter she brings me from M. Brouseau is so convincingly genuine that with all the desire in the world to disbelieve her, I am unable to do so."

There was nothing more to be said. There were no words of pity for the young girl who was to bear the brunt of this thing spoken. There was no hope of comforting words from the pastor. Eleanor had expected none when she came. She had performed her duty and was ready now to leave.

She walked homeward in a sad frame of mind. This woman's coming had marred a peaceful present and blurred a rosy future. Miss Morgan's time for day-dreams had not yet passed away. And she had been dreaming such a sweet dream about Max and brown-eyed De

phine before this rude awakening. Eh! well it was not the first dream she had been rudely awakened from. But it must be the last.

At her own gate she found the massive form of Sergeant Danbury.

"Just about to step in to deliver this from the little lady," he informed her.

Eleanor was conscious of feeling doubly glad at this rencontre. She was glad that the impulsive child had not come rushing back upon them just in the midst of this perplexing business, and she was glad of the opportunity to cross-examine Sergeant Danbury in the matter which was weighing so heavily on her mind. Perhaps he could identify this woman.

"I am very glad you have come down alone—" she grasped his big hand with a warmth of welcome that sent a flush of gratified pride over the old man's rugged features. "Maybe you can help us."

"Help you! I'm as willing to try, as I'm sorry to know you need help. Alex Danbury's yours to command, dear lady."

"But come in first. You are to dine with us. There is a great deal to tell you. It all concerns your little lady."

"And maybe you'd like to read her letter before we settle down to talk."

Miss Morgan took the letter and passed on to her own room, to relieve herself of gloves and hat.

The little lady's letter was short and characteristic:

"DARLING NONNE: Don't trouble about me. I've turned sister of charity and am having a splendid time. At present I have a new pet to take care of. It is a sick Frenchman, that I found in the woods, and Dan came very near killing him (make him tell you all about it); so we are in duty bound to see him through (Max is going to call that along, but I am writing in a hurry and nothing else fits). Cousin Paul, to whom he came addressed, has been here to see him, and will take him over to the lodge as soon as he can be moved. But in the meantime, mother Danbury and Lucy Samuels (she is an angel, make Dan tell you all about her) have been helping me to nurse him. His being here has made the old place really lively. As soon as Paul takes him home I will make Dan bring him back to Wickam. Kiss dearest Evelyn and Max for me.

"P. S.—Mother Danbury has just told me that she intended also to write by Alexander. I know from the the way her mouth looked when she said 'Alexander,' that she is going to write something awful about me. But as

she is a Christian, I suppose I am safe from slander at her pen."

Next Eleanor read the Christian's message.

"Miss Morgan:

"RESPECTED LADY: I would not feel satisfied that I'd done my duty to you or to the giddy child down stairs, if I did not send you a plain statement of the goings on in this old house. Miss Delphine and my son Alexander, who is not a bit less of a simpleton than the first named, found a sick man in the woods and brought him home, and had him put into the best bed in the house, linen sheets and all (although, as a consistent follower of the gentle Jesus, I should not let him suffer), without stopping to inquire whether they was bringing small-pox or what into the house. Since he's been here the expense he's put us to in the way of extras is terrible to calculate (though, as a Christian woman I hope I will never begrudge my mite to a fellow sufferer). He gives more trouble than a dozen babies, and thinks no more of breaking my rest than if I had been his own born mother (though I'm not unmindful of His command to do good to all).

"I cannot think it right the way these two young men cousins make free of the house. They come and they go just as they please, and a merrier four than them and the two girls would be hard to find (not that I mean to be so unchristianlike as to insinuate they ever forgets they are ladies and gentlemen).

"If the above meets with your approval it is all one to me. But I've only obeyed the golden rule by letting you know; though, in my young days, young girls weren't allowed quite such a long tether.

"Considering I've done my duty as a Christian woman, yours with esteem,

"SELINA DANBURY."

So much more important was the matter on hand, and so complete was Eleanor's confidence in the object of all this solicitude, that she rejoiced over the sick Frenchman as a most opportune detention.

Throwing the letter into her desk, she returned to the sitting room, and, for the second time that day, told the story of the Frenchwoman and her claim, this time to a most sympathetic hearer.

"Good God! who'd have thought it?"

"You knew, then, that Delphine's mother was not dead?"

"Yes, ma'am; I knew where and how we left her."

"Did you ever see Mrs. Staunton?"

"Once only."

"Once only?" I thought you had been with Colonel Staunton so long."

I had been for some time before married. But it so happened that just about the time he was in his head, I was called on him, to travel about a little sick sister, whose life was precious for us to spend our all in to save it. I was away from him all the happy part of his married life when I came back he was away, to cure her of her grief about her

He came back with a crazy wife. When the doctors said she must go to the asylum, that I saw her for the first time. The Colonel came to me, so miserable and tired-out like, to tell me a carriage would be there to ask (you see he didn't want every fool in the streets to be staring), the strong person must go with the carriage, as she was violent. I went with him to the poor room. He took one hand in his and I took one under mine. That only time I ever saw her. She looked at us like a lamb, poor little wo-

you think you would know her if you saw her?"

"I think I should," said the sergeant, "I can describe her, please, Sergeant." Sergeant Danbury described the woman.

"Then so many Frenchwomen are like that, with large dark eyes and dark hair," said the sergeant, "it's true. But if it's not her, Miss Morgan, who in God's name can it be? There is there could come over here, and tell everything about the Colonel, and show a letter from M. Brousseau, and so on? And we had no right to think the sergeant would get well. The little girl was seven years old when her mother died, and, according to her story, she was well now over a year. I suppose plenty of people have been that in the asylum, and come out right."

"There's not much that time can accomplish, and, in the long run, it shows but what it may be for the girl's happiness?"

"Such a mother, Sergeant," said the sergeant, "I never knew her. But I did know her mother. He would never have married anything but a lady."

"There is a coarseness about the woman's lack of a lady's composure, that I don't like."

"That, I expect, would cause

"Perhaps. You think you could tell her again?"

"I do."

"She will be here, this evening. You must stay. I want you to examine her face well without being seen by her."

"With all my heart. But there's one little test that would make me believe in her quicker than her looks, which may—which must—have changed very much."

"And that test?"

"I used to hear her sing a little song called 'Pensez à Moi,' in her crazy moods. If by any way that song could be placed before her, and I could hear her voice while she was singing it, I believe I could swear to her."

"You shall hear it. The song is in my own books. I will leave it open upon the music rack. If it attracts her attention and she sings it I will be convinced."

With anxious hearts the Morgans looked forward to the return of the Frenchwoman and to the result of Sergeant Danbury's test.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER WITNESS FOR CLAIMANT.

"How would you be
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are?"

—Shakespeare.

With early lamp-light came the stranger. Miss Morgan received her with chilling politeness, and conducted her to an arm-chair in the full blaze of the lamp. The sitting room door connecting with the drawing room was purposely left open and the apartment unlighted. In obscurity himself, Sergeant Danbury was thus at liberty to scan the stranger's features deliberately and thoroughly.

Neither Max nor Evelyn were visible. They preferred it so. Miss Morgan was to leave the room as soon as the test song had been sung, to receive Sergeant Danbury's testimony.

What a mockery it would seem, this commonplace society formula, asking for a song! A song when her own soul was on the rack! Would the woman even comply with a request, which, if she were possessed of the minimum of sensibility, must strike her as singularly out of place. Eleanor did not know. The whole thing was a game of hazard.

Scarce breathing audibly, his big fig-

ure drawn back against the cushions of the chair in a most comfortless position, Sergeant Danbury entered upon his novel rôle of detective.

The mincing, cat-like tread with which the stranger entered the room was totally unlike the gliding motion of the poor lady who had leaned on his arm, when they were taking her away from her home and her baby. But then, he had always heard those poor creatures in the asylum learned to be so cunning and stealthy; there's where she got that cat-like tread. Her face was older, too, to be sure it was; nine more years of trouble had left care-worn furrows about the brow; and harder it did seem—but had not the poor woman gone through with enough to harden soul and face, too? Her eyes! Those big, shining eyes! Surely those were the very same eyes that had looked at him so pitifully, like some dumb, stricken thing, when he was helping to take her away. He had said those eyes would haunt him into the grave, and here they were, stabbing him again, as it were. Calling on him now, as they had seemed to do then, to help her. Then he could do nothing for her; but now could he not befriend her by helping to prove she was what she said she was? He could and he would. The longer he looked into those big eyes, the surer he felt that the Colonel's crazy wife was before him. Poor lady; how sad her face looked. And what made them treat her with so much cruel suspicion? How it must madden her, all this unnecessary delay when she'd come so far, burning to see her child, the baby she'd been taken from such weary years ago. Sergeant Danbury felt his heart going out in one great burst of sympathetic pity toward this forlorn stranger in a land of unbelieving strangers. Poor lady! Had she not seen enough trouble that could not be helped without having so much more piled upon her that could be helped? Why was not Mons. Brousseau's letter of introduction enough to convince them? For the life of him, he could not see why they found her so hard to believe in, with that letter, and the master's letter and his telling them she was alive, to back her claim. If it was not Delphine's mother, who should it be? No one.

All these thoughts went rushing through the old soldier's brain, and he *had made up his verdict* in favor of plain-

tiff in the short while that it took Miss Morgan to tell the stranger that they had instituted certain inquiries, which must be satisfactorily answered before Delphine could be allowed to return to Wickam.

A flush—of mortified pride, thought the Sergeant; of fear, thought Miss Morgan—dyed the Frenchwoman's face a purplish crimson.

"You have written to M. Brousseau?"

"I have.

"You have asked him to write directly to you, concerning me?"

"I have."

"I am glad. It is painful, though. You American people must meet with much deception to make you so unbelieving."

"Perhaps so; but, as I told you in our last interview, there is much at stake in this matter."

"It is probable you have asked him for a photograph. I believe that is the usual course when one wishes to detect an impostor."

"You guess well."

"He will not be able to send you one. The only picture of me existing is in a double case, which should be in Delphine's possession. It is of her father and myself, taken soon after our marriage. Mine must necessarily be but a poor picture of the woman before you. I am years older, and have gone through centuries of trouble since it was taken. The eyes, though, must convince you."

Miss Morgan looked at the woman arguing the question of her own identity so calmly, with a feeling of wonder at her coolness under such trying circumstances.

The foreigner was a skilled physiognomist.

"You are thinking that I am strangely calm?"

"I certainly was."

"It is the consciousness that my claim will soon be made clear which sustains me. Moreover, after a woman has gone through with what I have, it is easy to be patient for a little longer while."

As a decoy, Eleanor had hung a picture of Delphine, recently taken, just blushing into beautiful womanhood, over the open piano.

"You must have some natural curiosity to know what Delphine looks like. There is her painted photograph over the piano."

"Curiosity! Mon Dieu! what an icy word to use to a mother whom you are keeping on the torture by your hard-hearted suspicions. But I have vowed to keep calm. You will do me full justice soon. Curiosity! Yes. Ah! say desire—wild, burning, maddening desire to hold my own in my arms. My baby, all that is left of a happy home! Father, husband, joy, buried; but you are her guardian. You are guarding her well. Lady, give me the poor little satisfaction of seeing my darling's painted features."

Eleanor led her to the picture over the piano.

"Delphine! my baby! my beautiful! When will they let these poor arms clasp you?"

In a burst of maternal anguish the "poor arms" were upstretched in apostrophe to the beautiful face looking down upon her tears, mutely, coldly, nay even smilingly.

A sniffing and a furtive blowing of the nose came from the soft-hearted detective's dark corner.

Shining through big drops, the lustrous eyes dropped from the picture to the music rack.

"*'Pensez à moi!'* Who has done that?"

A Siddons might have envied the impassioned dignity of her gesture. A ghastly pallor overspread her face—her song! She gasped almost beneath her breath: "My father's song! My murdered father's song!"

Shivering, moaning, white, she dropped upon the piano stool, laying her wet cheek in the open sheet of music with a low cry.

Surely, thought Eleanor Morgan, if this be an actress, she is a very queen of tragedy.

Bitterly against her own will, she was convinced that it was Delphine's mother who was weeping there before her.

"Pardon"—and for the first time her voice sounded kindly in addressing the stranger—"I regret that you should have been so disturbed. You need a cordial. I will procure one. Excuse me for a moment."

Sergeant Danbury met her in the dining room, his eyes and face suggestive of incipient measles.

"Well?"

"I think there is no room for doubts, Miss Morgan."

"You could swear to this woman's identity?"

"No, ma'am, for that swearing to folks has done a deal of mischief in this world. Many an innocent soul has been sworn into eternity by folks being too certain. I can't swear to her, but I am as certain as a man can be of anything he aren't swearin' certain of, that the lady in yonder is the master's wife."

Mr. Morgan was in the dining room, waiting for their arrival.

He listened silently to all Eleanor had to tell, and to Sergeant Danbury's opinion.

"Well, brother; has the time come for acknowledging Mrs. Staunton?"

"No!" sharply and decisively. "So far, circumstantial evidence seems overpowering. I insist upon Brousseau's letter being waited for."

"Very well." Pouring out the cordial, Eleanor returned to the drawing room with it.

The stranger had spent the interval in overcoming her agitation.

"Pardon my excitement," she purred softly. "It is wrong for me to allow myself to be so overcome when I have been warned so carefully about giving way to agitation. I am calm again, quite calm. Tell me just what you will have me do."

"Wait!"

"Without seeing my child?" Her ready tears welled up once more.

Miss Morgan was silent; she hardly knew what to say. Madame, the victor, assisted her.

"Ah! I have it. Weeks must intervene before M. Brousseau's letter comes. You wish your ward perfected in French. You engage me as her instructress. You let me stay in your house in such capacity. I see my child daily. I hear her voice. I touch her sweet form. Say 'yes,' sweet lady; say 'yes.'"

Miss Morgan said "yes."

The next morning the modest trunk containing all her belongings was removed from the Wickam Hotel, and the cat-like stranger with the untrustworthy eyes was installed as Miss Morgan's ward's French governess.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER MEET.

"Blood connection is sweet, and is what nature brings about, but how much sweeter are the alliances of the soul! How much dearer and more intimate than even brotherly love are the bonds of truth."—*Engel.*

Sergeant Danbury had gone back to the country, solemnly pledged to silence.

"Preparation for such a calamity," Max had said very bitterly, "there could be none. When it became inevitable, she should hear all there was to tell; before it became inevitable she need hear nothing."

Now, Alexander Danbury—blessings on his transparent soul!—was scarcely more retentive than a mammoth sieve. Though all his simple life, all that he knew (with the notable exception of the master's sorrowful secret) had been allowed to percolate gently into publicity without a demur on his part. To form his own opinions of men and their doings was a mental exertion, he considered, altogether disproportioned to the result. Custom was the most excellent regulator of a man's views. But how could one be sure he was acting in conformity with custom, without an interchange of opinions on all subjects? Reticence, he considered a superfluous, if not a doubtful virtue. In the present instance, however, he had promised good Miss Morgan to be reticent, and let his promise be never so painful in the observance, reticent he would be.

Carrying home with him such a tremendous secret, watching the little lady flitting about the old house actively engaged in doing nothing, thinking all the while of the overwhelming surprise in store for her, quite overburdened the breast so unused to carrying matter of any weight or moment. The necessity for plugging himself up, as it were, to prevent this obtrusive secret from sifting through him, made him uncomfortable. He sought safety in absolute silence. If he talked at all, what guarantee had he that he would not drift round to that one forbidden subject? This enforced silence closely resembled moodiness.

"Pray God," was the inward aspiration of pious Mother Danbury, "that this new seriousness comes from the awakening of conscience." Whereupon, in a voice

cracked by time and, perhaps, never much celebrated for sweetness, she crooned, as she strung her red-peppers, "Sinner, turn; why will you die?"

Delphine did not take such a soul-comforting view of this new phase of manner in her heretofore ever-smiling vassal. She revelled in sunshine and hated clouds, sunshiny days and sunshiny people were her inspiration. Paul Weyland was sunshiny and she loved him. Dan always had been, and he, too, was very near to her affections. She could brook no shadow of change in those few she loved.

"Dan," said this small queen, in her authoritative fashion, "You must take me back to Wickam, tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, little lady!"

"Tomorrow, big Dan."

"And for why?"

"Because I want to go. I want to see Nonee and Max and Evelyn. Besides, you've grown disagreeable since you came back from Wickam. Blucher is a smiling cherub by contrast. I stop liking people when they forget how to laugh and jest."

Poor Dan! He blushed guiltily and heaved a deep-drawn sigh under the pressure of that secret. He was troubled in mind on a new score. Was it a right thing for him to do, to take the child back to Wickam, just then, before they were through with all their tiresome writing backwards and forwards? The right thing or the wrong thing, it was the only thing he could do if she had set her head on going. In the depths of his soul—a soul where romance slept but was not dead—he was glad.

"Blood's thicker'n water," he said to himself, "and once get them both under the same roof, and all King George's horses couldn't keep mother and daughter apart any longer."

In his ready sympathy for the tearful stranger, Sergeant Danbury was unconsciously fostering a resentful feeling toward Delphine's truest friends.

Just at twilight on the next day he deposited his precious charge inside Miss Morgan's gate—going away himself to find shelter for the night at the Wickam Hotel. After all his secret rejoicing he felt somewhat nervous about the *déroulement*, and preferred leaving the whole matter in the hands of fate and good Miss Morgan.

Almost running toward the house,

Delphine came suddenly upon a female figure pacing to and fro upon the gravel walk running parallel with the verandah.

"Noneel you dearest darling, say you're glad to have me back." Two warm arms clasped the figure and a shower of kisses rained upon the unresisting lips.

"At last! at last! Delphine! Sweet babe—"

Springing backward and peering curiously into the face upon which she had just lavished such testimonials of affection, Delphine spoke in a voice bubbling over with suppressed amusement:

"Excuse me, madame; I did not know we had visitors. Who have I greeted with such boisterous affection at first sight?"

"Ah! it was so sweet, dear child, you do not know."

"Delphine! Child!" A quick firm tread on the pebbly walk, a voice strangely vibrant with emotion and gladness, and Max was by her side, his privileged arm about her, and his kiss of welcome on her lips.

Drawing her hand within his arm, Max drew her toward the house away from this strange woman, whose glittering eyes were fastened on the pair with a queer look, compounded of hatred and longing, in them; hatred for this bold man, who still tried to keep her own from her; longing for the time to come when no one dare say a word where she and that beautiful girl were concerned.

"Who is that, Max?" Delphine nodded backward toward where the dark figure still stood motionless.

"A—wom—a lady Eleanor has here."

"She is queer, isn't she?"

"Queer! hum! queer? No. What is there queer about her? She is rather handsome than otherwise, some think. There, go in to Eleanor, she is in the wing room. I came out to smoke my cigar." He pushed her forward almost rudely and strode back toward the garden.

"They're all growing queer," thought Delphine, as she sped forward to embrace the two women who had been more than mother and more than sister to her forlorn childhood.

It was not that Eleanor's arms did not enfold her just as tightly as usual. It was not that her "dear child" was less tender or kind than it always was. It

was not that Evelyn's saintly face did not light up just as brightly as ever, at sight of her. What was it, then? There was a something new and strange and unpleasant about the home atmosphere; a something of which Delphine was painfully conscious, but too ignorant to define clearly. She felt it, and it reacted promptly, in the shape of a pouting protest.

"You are all so strange to me. What is the matter, Nonee? Are you angry? Angry because I staid so long, or is it about that poor sick man, that Mother Danbury was so excited over. I'm so glad you're not good people here. Good people are so tiresome and lose their tempers on such slight provocation. I've come home here thinking I was getting away from cross-grained saints and going to be so happy with amiable sinners, but you're all out of fix, somehow. I meet a horrid stranger in the garden, who puts her scrawny arms about me with such disgusting familiarity that I have to push her away from me; then Max comes, and I am so glad to see him; but in his turn he pushes me away from him, as if he was sorry I had come back. You and Evy look as sober as if somebody was dying in the house—and—and I don't understand a bit of it." The pouting red lips quivered in a threatening fashion over the last sentence.

"Look, child! If 'Max did push you away from him,' as you assert so resentfully, maybe it was to go for this." It was Max who spoke, standing over her with a gracefully-shaped vase in his hands, over whose curving rim drooped a profusion of her floral favorites.

He was looking down upon her clouded brow and pouting lips with such a full heart and, as Eleanor thought, with such tell-tale eyes.

"Then, after all, you are glad I have come home?"

"Home!" Max repeated the word involuntarily. What a stab to think that soon, maybe, this bright young thing, so beautiful and so dear, would have to go away with that black-eyed interloper to make a new home out of such poor material, leaving her old one, robbed and desolate. His soul rose rebelliously against this woman who had come back, it did seem, from the very grave, to smite to the dust all the brightness of the present and all the glorious promise of the future.

"Answer me, Max;" thus imperiously was he summoned from his reverie.

"Glad, child? You know I am glad. Take this vase to your own room. You will not find its fellow there. You know you and I repudiate matched vases or duplicated beauty in anything."

It was not until she found herself facing the stranger at the tea table, that Delphine had her first look at the features she had bestowed such rapturous kisses upon in the uncertain twilight.

It was with amused curiosity she scanned the face of this woman, who had come all the way across the seas to meddle with her placid lot in life.

"You must have thought an escaped lunatic had swooped down upon you, when I hugged you so convulsively," she said pleasantly, by way of relieving the awkward embarrassment (she thought) of Nonee's strange visitor.

The Frenchwoman started at the sudden address, and first flushed, then paled.

"No," she purred softly, quickly recovering her usual self-possession: "I thought a bright, quick, sweet, whole-souled girl had her arms about me. Ah! it was pleasant."

Then Delphine—dismissing the stranger from her thoughts, now that she had in a manner apologized for her own boisterousness—entered into a rattling account of her doings while in the country. M. Emile Girardeau, his discovery, his domestication, his recovery and his departure with Paul, constituting the body of her narrative.

Very earnestly were the stranger's eyes fastened upon the speaker's bright face; her interest in the girl's story seemed intense. Not a look, nor a word nor a gesture escaped her. Delphine was not unaware of this rigid surveillance, and it annoyed her.

More than once the brave, honest eyes of the young girl flashed a reproofing glance into the restless ones of the stranger. At last her irritation found vent in the words:

"Why do you stare at me so? Do I resemble any one you know? You annoy me."

"You resemble some one I know, as she looked at your age. Pardon me; I will annoy you no longer."

Rising hastily from her place, the unrecognized mother passed from the room, her big eyes shining through unshed tears.

"Nonee, where did you find that disagreeable woman? I am sorry I hurt her feelings, but those strange eyes of hers quite took away my appetite. See, my muffin is cold and greasy, and you know I do love muffins. Sad, isn't it?"

It was by this skilful commingling of petulance with merry nonsense that this consummate queen of hearts generally warded off admonition.

"She comes from your mother's country and is of your mother's people. You must try to feel kindly toward her, Delphine."

Thus Miss Morgan, very gently, by way of laying the foundation upon which was to be reared (out of what?) the beautiful altar of filial devotion.

"Nonee, I never tried to feel anything in my life that the trial did not end in ignominious failure. My feelings, to be successes, must partake of the nature of spontaneous combustion. If there is any duty involved in liking your queer importation, I will promise to try; but I do not like her; in fact, I am afraid I dislike her."

"A girlish and unreasoning prejudice."

"Perhaps! Do you like her, Nonee? and you, Max? and you, Evy?"

What an inconvenient trick this child had of asking point-blank questions, especially inconvenient when no one had a point-blank answer ready for her.

"She knows all about your mother's girlhood."

"Then I shall like to talk to her. Maybe it was my mamma she meant, when she said she knew some one I resembled."

"Very probably."

"But then that was no good reason for staring my muffin cold in that ill-bred fashion."

"Do you not think those eyes which annoyed you so, are very handsome?"

"If, as Mother Danbury is so fond of reminding me, 'Handsome is as handsome does,' no. Prejudice aside—yes."

"She is rather handsome than otherwise."

"Nonee, she is not a lady."

"Another rash decision."

Max pushed his chair impatiently from the table. Where was the use, he thought, of Eleanor's trying to force this clear-sighted girl to see attractions and virtues where none existed? When the time came—as come it must, soon, if ever—for Delphine Staunton to acknowledge this woman as her mother, she would do

it dutifully and bravely; but neither her admiration or her love could ever be forced.

They had hoped—he and Eleanor—that M. Brousseau's answer to their letter of inquiry would come before Delphine's return to Wickam. It would have saved them the present course of double-dealing, and have simplified matters in all respects. They must get it to-morrow; and, when it came? For the first time in his life, Max felt fear—fear of the consequences to that proud, high-strung girl, when compelled to stoop to such a mother. fear of the consequences to himself, when this sunbeam should pass away to brighten another home; fear of the torturing task devolving upon himself of telling this hateful secret to the unsuspicious child. It was a cruel duty. His soul revolted at the performance of it.

With restless strides he paced the verandah, his hands clasped rigidly behind his back, until the sound of Delphine's masterly touch on the piano magnetized him into the drawing room.

He went and stood close by her, watching her fast flying fingers, thinking how white and pretty they looked, and how sweet the sounds he was hearing, maybe for the last time. He wanted to lay his hand on the shining hair and bless her; he wanted to lift up the sweet face, whose piquante profile was tempting him and tantalizing him, and tell its girlish owner how very very dear she had become to the strong man's soul, yearning over this child he had petted and cradled in his arms, until she had twined herself about the closest fibres of his nature.

He looked so calm and cold, standing there by her, naming piece after piece for her to play, that, though all the lookers on were women—natural born love detectives—not one (save Eleanor, who had been tracing the clear pure stream of her brother's devotion from the moment when it sprang into sudden crystalline existence, with a quiet gladness, until now, when it threatened to become a turbulent torrent of passion) spent one instant of conjecture about the two.

The evening, a strange but happy, a constrained, but tender sort of evening, wore away at last.

Delphine had bestowed her good-night caress on the three she loved best of all the world, and a courteous "Good even-

ing" on the stranger in passing her; then gone away to sleep as placidly and as care-free as on that far-away night when Sergeant Danbury had brought her slumbering into this home, where peace and love had attended her ever since.

Would it be productive of good or evil if we always knew when we had pressed the last kiss on beloved lips; when we had tasted the joy of joys for the last time; when the turning point in our lives had come to us; when good-fortune had said "Get thee gone," to ill-fortune; when the carelessly spoken good-bye was to be the final earthly farewell?

Ah! if we knew what wealth of tenderness would be compressed into that last kiss! what fullness of appreciation forced into that last taste of joy! What buoyancy of soul at the turning of the tide! What exultation of welcome to that rare visitant, good-fortune! What pathos in that last good-by!

But Delphine did not know; else that "Good-night," which was given with the carelessness of habitude, would have been elevated into a very nocturne.

CHAPTER XV.

DELPHINE LOSES FAITH.

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood meet."

—Longfellow.

The next morning, Delphine, fresh and rosy and delicious, from the knot of blue ribbon that held back the heavy braids of nut-brown hair to the last daintily fluted ruffle on her crisp muslin dress, was engaged about her initial duty of the day, loosening the earth around the roots of a splendid array of geraniums, which ornamented one end of the verandah. She was singing blithely. Her song was a sort of thanksgiving song for the bright glad morning, and the sweet home feeling that the geraniums helped to restore, and for joy-giving sensations which seemed to fill her whole being, this morning, without the desire or power on her part for analysis or classification.

A hand was laid caressingly upon her shoulder, while an unfamiliar voice purred a soft morning greeting into her ear.

The thanksgiving song terminated.

ruptly. Giving her pretty shoulders the slightest possible shake by way of ridiculing them of the obnoxious touch, she responds to the greeting without turning from her task.

"Oh! it is Madame, the stranger. Excuse me, but no one has given me any name to call you by yet. You are an early riser."

"No; 'Madame, the stranger,' is not an early riser from choice or practice. She was beguiled from her couch, this morning, by the sweet singing of a lark, and she bethought her it would be pleasant for once to arise early and get a glimpse of the pretty singer."

"Lark? We have no larks."

"*Fa donc!* What a matter-of-fact little creature it is, then!"

"Oh, you meant me. Excuse me, and I suppose I should add thanks."

"No; it is I who should give thanks. You sing sweetly. Your voice carries me back, oh! so far back into a happy past—a past gone forevermore."

"I believe everybody's past, happy or unhappy, is gone forevermore," says the prosaic lark.

An angry flush dyed the Frenchwoman's dark skin a shade darker. Said her eyes, "insolent minx!" said her lips, "what ready wit! The child fairly bubbles over with it."

Tired of being the target for such broad personalities, flattering although they were, Delphine gave the earth about Max's favorite apple geranium a decidedly vicious stab, left the fork quivering in the wound and turning upon the stranger, said in her usual right-at-it manner:

"Miss Morgan tells me you know all about my dead mother. I know no more about her than I do about the builders of the Egyptian pyramids. I should like to hear about her girlhood. Will you talk to me about her?"

"Yes, I will talk to you about her. But come, we will seat ourselves first in the garden, upon one of your friend, Mr. Max's, pretty green iron sofas, under your friend, Mr. Max's, sweet smelling jessamine boughs."

The desired location secured, she turned interlocutor:

"You would dislike much to leave this pretty home," she rather asserted than questioned.

"I shall never leave it," said the

"'Never!' What a great word for such a small mouth."

"I know its full value, though."

"The word's or the home's?"

"Both."

"But if someone who loved you came for you?"

"No one loves me more than they do in yonder," nodding confidently towards the house.

"That maybe so far, and yet it is not impossible that you might be summoned away from it all. Suppose the case, what would you do?"

"Refuse to obey the summons."

Oh the charming, insolent security of extreme youth!

"But you brought me here to talk about my mother's past, not my future."

"What would you know?"

"Everything that you can tell me; but, first of all, satisfy my curiosity on an outside subject. Miss Morgan tells me she has engaged you to perfect me in French. I want to like you, but I don't like riddles in any shape or form. Why did you stare at me so rudely last night? Why did you leave the room in tears? I could see no call for so much melo-drama. Is it because you are French that you are so intense about trifles?"

"It may be so."

"How exhausting that sort of thing must be to keep up all through one's life."

"But I brought you here to talk about your mother's past, not my present."

"You are right; let us confine ourselves to the text."

"And our firstly?" asked Madame, brightening under the appreciative smile flung at her in reward for her neatness in retort.

"Shall be, what she looked like when young."

"Like me, people said, when we were both young."

Delphine looked at her resentfully.

"You do not like me to say so."

"I did not say that. Go on, please."

"You have a picture of her, a picture set in a locket jewelled with rubies. Her picture is on one side, your father's on the other."

"I have. But how should you know that?"

"Have I not already told you that I knew all about your mother? We were intimate, I loved her as I loved myself.

I saw that picture when it was taken. She laughed and told me it was a good likeness of me. Look at that picture when you go to the house."

"Well! well!" exclaimed Delphine impatiently, "what matters a chance likeness? Tell me about her character, her life; was she a saint or a coquette? Every Frenchwoman has to be one or the other, does she not?"

"Child, let me warn you of a rock in your pathway upon which multitudes of brilliant young ladies shatter their reputations for wisdom. Do not allow your wit to degenerate into flippancy. The young fear that the world will not recognize their genius unless it be continually fired off in squibs before its unappreciating eyes, which squibs are noways more lasting or valuable than your noisy red fire-crackers."

Delphine was surprised into something very like respect. With all her lofty independence there was never a little child more ready to acknowledge herself in fault than was this brave girl.

"You are right. I was flippancy. Now let us talk about mamma."

So the Frenchwoman wove her story, keeping the child who had never known a mother's care or love entranced with the description of that mother's charms and virtues, until her recital was interrupted by the sound of the breakfast bell.

Mr. Morgan was just hanging his hat on the rack as they entered by the front door.

"Been to town, already, Max?"

"Yes, I wanted my letters."

"And did the early bird meet with the promised reward of worms?"

"He did—one of a viperous order, perhaps."

"Viperous, Max? The atmosphere of this house grows thick with mystery!"

But Max did not accord his usually indulgent smile to her nonsense. His face was grave to sternness. It chilled the persiflage on her lips, and she walked by his side toward the breakfast room with grave decorum.

What a solemn affair that breakfast was! The viands were passed around with funereal gravity and partaken of as sparingly as if the hearse, which was to bear away from them all that was good or desirable in life, was even then awaiting their tardy coming. The stranger wore a half-frightened look, and Delphine a wholly puzzled one.

The meal over, Miss Morgan obeyed her brother's mute invitation and followed him into his study.

"It has come!"

If the day of doom had put in a sudden and unwelcome appearance, Max Morgan could not have made the announcement with greater solemnity of face or voice.

"Have you read it?"

"No; it is addressed to you," He handed her the fateful letter.

She read it aloud, translating into English as she read:

"Your letter, my dear madam, has caused me some surprise, as I could not, nor yet can I, see occasion for your cruel suspicion of the unfortunate Madame Staunton. She went to you with a letter of introduction from me—the very letter which you return to me. I placed her in the good hands of a well-known family of your New York. The lady who delivered that letter to you is the mother of my ward. There is but one thing that puzzles me. It is the long time elapsed since she left this country.

"You ask for a picture of Madame Staunton. I can procure none. She has no relations in this part of the country; none, I believe in the world, excepting the cousin who was so devoted to her interests while an inmate of the asylum, and who, I learn upon inquiry, returned to her home in the rural districts when no longer needed.

"You make no mention of M. Gustave Barrière, my own confidential clerk, who was to act as escort to Mme. Staunton, until she was under your roof, and then prosecute a tour through the States in my business interests. I have not heard from him since his departure, but cannot believe that he is playing me false.

"Mrs. Staunton is *petite*, dark, and has a most lustrous pair of dark eyes. She talks in the softest and gentlest of voices. More exact description I cannot give you, but hope that this letter will be sufficient to ensure this unfortunate lady the right to embrace the daughter, from whom she has been so long severed by a cruel dispensation of Providence;" etc., etc.

Brother and sister sat mute after reading this confirmation of the Frenchwoman's claim. Eleanor spoke first:

"Poor Max! and you loved this child."

"I love this child."

"You had formed your plans for the future."

"I had. Bright, golden plans they were, too."

"In the fullness of time, not while she was a coy, simple little girl, ignorant of the world and of other men, but when she had weighed them, subjected them to the crucible of that sharp clear judgment of hers, I would have asked her if she could receive me—old and commonplace as I should be by comparison with her—into the sacredest chamber of her heart, and let me call it mine, and I would have cherished her so. The earth should have yielded its riches and the heavens their blessings for her sweet sake. Ambition, with her for my inspiration, could never have soared too high; labor, with her comfort for its object, could never have grown too burdensome; life, with her to brighten it, would have known so little of shadow. But now—"

"Well—now?"

"That viper is to be her legal guardian. She has the right—a right she will not be slow to exercise—to take the darling of our hearts away from us, to do with her what she will. She hates me. Hates me for my obstinate distrust of her. I see it every time those black eyes rest on me. Delphine is still Delphine, the dearest object on earth. I would still cling to the hope of some day calling her my wife, but it would come to nought. She now owes a duty of nature's own imposing towards this mother, which would forever clash with my interests. I shall not droop under this unexpected turn of events, nor wear the willow; though this woman has levelled one of the brightest castles in the air ever reached by a man not skilled in aerial architecture. I shall never build another. You and Evy and I will go down to the grave as a mateless trio—a celibate, but not, therefore, a cynical family. As long as I live, Delphine Staunton will be an object of tenderest affection to me. But a marriage with her, involving domestication with this mother of hers, would not be the perfection of dual happiness I demand when I do marry. It would not satisfy me, and yet oh, my little one! how can I give you up?"

Eleanor Morgan's bairn had been very busy while Max was pouring out his heart for the first and last time, in a nearer approach to a lament than his strong nature approved. Max's happiness was very near to her heart, but so was his fame. It had been the dream of

her unselfish life (her one dream, in fact, since she and William Staunton had so marred their lives) to see this cherished brother at the head of his chosen profession. Long ago, she had begun to be aware that Delphine was twining herself very closely about Max's true, faithful heart, and (for she was a woman) she had built her own castle on the slender foundation of smiles and tender words and gentle caresses, until the stately pile had taken on form and substance, becoming a vivid and comely reality. And why should it not be? Where would the combination of truth, manliness and disinterestedness, which William Staunton aimed at securing for his child by concealing the fact of her heiress-ship, be found in greater perfection than in this kingly brother of hers?

But Max was not to know about the future, for he would scorn the idea of wooing this child he so loved if he knew her to be a wealthy young lady. But now everything was changed. This mother had changed it all. Max's fame was still, and must always be, her first object in life. She knew him better than he knew himself. He would try to reason himself into tolerance of the mother for sake of the daughter. He might win Delphine, but what then. As he had said, the duty she owed her mother, would forever clash with his interests. Discord in his home would clog his energies, clip the wings of his ambition and eventually make of him an embittered and disappointed man.

For a while, during the rosy days of the honeymoon, the bare possession of Delphine might fill his life, but the rosy hue of the dawn would quickly fade into the sober gray of every-day life, and honey soon cloy. What then? Regret, disappointment and the dreary process of making up one's mind to quiet endurance, as the highest good to be extracted from the situation. For his sake, for her own sake, Eleanor resolved to ward off this gloomy lot from the two she loved so well. Her mind once made up, no motives of mawkish sentimentality could deter her.

"Max," she began, breaking a silence which had lasted some minutes; "are you quite sure that you do not love Delphine well enough to marry her and risk her mother?"

"No, I do not believe I am quite sure."

"You are poor, yet, Max."

"Well, what of that? By the time she would be ready to marry, I should have plenty."

"But she would not need it."

"Not need it, with this added burden?"

"Delphine Staunton is an heiress, Max."

"A what?"

"An heiress."

Then Eleanor told the whole story, including her promise of secrecy.

"Why have you broken your promise of secrecy at this late day?"

"Because I have weighed my promise to the dead against my duty to the living and decided it was best to break it."

"What is your duty to the living?"

"To prevent a marriage between you two for both your sakes. I love you both too well to allow you to become man and wife."

"Delphine an heiress, and you aware of it; yet let me go on loving her, when you knew my scorn of fortune-hunters. Eleanor, was it well done?"

"I think it was. Is there any crime in loving a sweet girl because she is possessed of money? If you had married her, it would have been from the purest motives, and you would have made her happy; but now everything is changed. It would not be for her happiness nor for yours. I knew of no more effective means of deciding your mind than those I have used. Forgive me, Max, if I have added one atom to your trouble."

"Everything has, indeed, changed. Poor little Calamity. A calamity her coming has proven to me."

What a pity that people under strong excitement lose sight of the fact that walls not only have ears, but are terrible tale bearers!

The "poor little calamity" had gone rummaging at that most unfortunate of moments for the picture which was to disprove any likeness between the woman for whom she had conceived such an instinctive hatred, and the mother for whom she felt an equally instinctive affection, and the trunk which contained the picture was in a closet against the wall of Mr. Morgan's study. Through the chinks of that treacherous closet came the assertion in accents of bitter earnest:

"A calamity her coming has proven to me."

She knew it was herself, for the story

of Max's dread of the baby invader had been told her, and what a weapon she had made of it in merry revenge. But this time there was no jest in it. Something terrible had occurred; what it was she would know. The picture was forgotten. She rapped at the study door, hastily availing herself of permission to enter.

"Excuse me, please, for interrupting your interview. I won't stay long. I wanted to tell you that I was in the closet in the ether room, looking for my ruby locket, and I overheard a remark made by Mr. Morgan"—poor little girl, how white she looked, and how stately that "Mr. Morgan" sounded, coming from her unpractised lips—"I am sorry I have proven such a calamity to you, Max. You've all been so good to me that I forgot I had no claim upon you. I want you to say 'good-bye.' I am going away. I won't stay another hour now I've found out you don't like me. Uncle Weyland will let me stay there till Dan can come for me. And, oh! to think all this time I thought you were good to me because you loved me—and you were just pitying me. I cannot bear to be pitied. I will not be pitied. None, you ought to have said 'no,' when papa asked you to take his forlorn little child home with you. I do not blame your brother for reproaching you, when he says he asked you never to bring me here."

"Delphine!" Max sprang to his feet in a perfect agony of pity and mortification. He could not tell her why he had called her a calamity. How could he clear himself from the appearance of the basest hypocrisy?

"Don't talk, Max, please. It is so impossible for you to explain it away. I am sorry I heard it, especially in the mean fashion I did, but it was not my fault, it was the fault of the closet, and yours. Oh, Max, tell me that you did not say it. Tell me I heard wrong. Call me a silly girl. Anything, anything, to take away this aching pain at my heart. I've loved you all so dearly, and I thought I was loved in return."

At first her words had come in a tempestuous torrent; the last ones were uttered with almost a wail. The little head, so proudly erect at first, drooped like some storm-beaten flower, and great shining tears quenched the passionate fire in her eyes.

"Bring in—Mrs. Staunton," Max almost whispered to his sister. He wanted Eleanor away; he would have the child all to himself for one short moment. Could he right himself in that moment?

"Delphine! My darling!" Oh, what a plenitude of love and longing lay in each syllable of those few words!

The storm-beaten flower reared its head.

"You did not say it then, Max?"

Silence—dread, confirmatory silence.

"You did say it then! Speak, coward! What can I do? A poor, puny girl."

"Child, you rave. I command you to hear me."

"Reserve your commands for those who must obey them. I am not of the number."

"Delphine, dear little girl—how dear you do not know—"

"Maxwell Morgan stooping to hypocrisy!" The girl, her slender form drawn up to its fullest height, with the head now proudly erect, the eyes brightly flashing, stood for a second a beautiful embodiment of surprise and indignation, when without a word, as quick as a humming bird in its flight, she sprang through the low window at her back, and sped along the garden paths toward her own room like a hunted thing, leaving behind her a proud man bowed by chagrin, and a faithful heart as full of pain as her own. The petulant child of his love had gone out from his presence an indignant woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

ACCEPTING THE SITUATION.

"All nature is but art unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."—*Pope*.

The "wickedest man in all Wickam" was seated in his big leathern office chair, a chair which had a trick of describing semi-circles when the corpulent little Judge was intent upon unravelling some legal knot, so tightly twisted that his mind must needs soar into entire oblivion of his body before success could be attained. But on this occasion the chair was not engaged professionally; it remained motionless, a sure indication that things were well with the Judge. So placid an expression beamed from his

keen gray eyes, so benevolent a smile played about his well-cut lips, that one could not but think wickedness had a very humanizing effect upon some folks. He was reading (the latest dicta of the scientists, it would be safe to guess), offering his bald head, the while, with the philanthropy of an optimist, as a skating-rink for adventurous flies, when a girlish voice, a not usual presence 'mid rows of musty law books, brought him back from the consideration of a caudate Adam to that of the prettiest possible result of evolution—a sweet young girl in a fresh muslin dress.

"Uncle Weyland!"

"Bless my soul, the niece!" A hand as white and plump as a woman's was held out in cordial greeting, for this man of brain and girl of soul were fast friends.

The Scientist was flung on the table to bide his time in patience, for which heroic act of self-denial, the niece kissed the hero and called him a good boy.

"Uncle Weyland, I am very unhappy."

"Unhappy! Bless us! Has our kitten been afflicted with dyspepsia or our canary got the colic?"

"Don't laugh, please. Things are very serious with me, just now, and you must not treat me as if I were the dyspeptic kitten or the colicky canary."

"But it is always best to laugh, little girl. Life would grow too serious else. It takes all the buffoonery and merriment that one half the world can manufacture to buoy up the serious half. The buffoons of this world are its unrecognized benefactors."

"Are you going to join their ranks as champion?" Severely.

"I might do worse, but *revenons*. I cannot believe that you have got beyond the laughing point already."

"Yes, I have, Uncle Weyland. I want you to give me shelter—I have no home."

"Poor little vagabond! Does it want a nickel, also, to buy a roll for its breakfast?"

Much surprised was the bantering Judge when a storm-gust of tears and sobs swept over the girlish face of the poor little vagabond, leaving it wet and sorrowful.

"Tut! is it serious enough for tears? Come then, I will be serious to know what is the trouble."

"Max hates me! Isn't that terrible! I heard him say so. I cannot live there

ger. I want to stay with you and Catherine, until Dan can come for them I will go and live in my own with him and Mother Danbury. will be out of every body's

say that you heard Maxwell say that he hated you!" sir, not in so many words, but had proven a calamity to him; and every one hate calamities? isn't stay there any longer, Uncle d."

course not, of course not; you will see you ought to have been all this and would have been but for some notable notion of your poor

It was fear, I always believed you and Paul if thrown together have made a match, he prejudged

from what he knew of the but Paul's not under discussion. why did you stop at the office; it have gone straight to Aunt ne?"

use a talk with you always tonic to me. You are my bit-better already."

Take care, you minx; but how the French teacher?" not endure her."

not, miss? She is handsome, intelligent, polished."

Is your silky-eared Murat, but I endure him all the same."

afraid the niece is too fastidious. could you do, for instance, if you solely connected with this lady? you would think her good looks

beauty; her intelligence, genius; dash, elegance. But come, I've needed you long enough for one Go home to Aunt Catherine.

I begin to straggle into my office soon, and this is no place for

you had the girl's farewell kiss old on his lips when Mr. Morgan, had harassed, entered the office. shine has been here."

denies it? But by what token assert it?"

the delicate odor of the violets pinned at her throat."

Is my soul! When your soul might should be into the body of a what a good retriever you would

The niece has been here, and every rage she is with you; broken shattered faith, misplaced confi-

dence and all the rest of it. You've been calling her pretty names, it seems—calamity and the like."

But the good-hearted little Judge was doomed to fail in all his efforts to laugh folks into a good humor with themselves and each other on that serious day. To him Max could have afforded to elucidate his apparent hypocrisy, but merely giving that handsome head of his an impatient shake he plunged straightway into weightier matters.

"M. Brousseau's answer has come."

"Well?"—quickly and seriously.

"He pronounces the shabby woman, with the mean face and the cowardly eyes, Mrs. William Staunton."

"The devil he does!"

"So there is no longer any excuse for keeping the knowledge from Delphine. I had proposed telling her myself, this morning, but she has left my house in wrath."

Judge Weyland was sober enough now. He had not known himself how much hope he had been entertaining that the woman would be proven an impostor. But he was not going to be a sign-post philosopher, stultifying himself at the first provocation, so he says briskly:

"Well, staring at each other like two ill-conditioned owls is not going to mend matters, nor alter the disagreeable fact of Mrs. Staunton's existence. I will tell the child all there is to tell when I go home to dinner, and you call round with the mother at six. She will be as ready for her then as she ever will be."

This arrangement made, Mr. Morgan left the Judge's office for his own, where he spent the morning cheerfully and profitably engaged in passing moral reflections upon the intermeddling propensities of fate, and wondering how and where all the present muddle would end.

The tale of woe sobbed out on Aunt Catharine's diamond breast-pin, Delphine had gone to the room assigned her, and was lying on the sofa, her aching head buried in the cushions, wondering if this crowded world held another such unhappy creature as herself, when through the keyhole Uncle Weyland piped a request for permission to enter.

It was accorded in a doleful "Come in."

He walked briskly up to the sofa, where she had cast her pretty, flounced muslin and her misery in one damp heap, drew her into a sitting position by his

side, and entered bravely upon the not easy task which chance had shifted from Mr. Morgan to himself.

"Delphine, my dear little niece, I have come here to tell you something that is going to astonish you first, then anger you, then rouse in you all the brave womanhood that little body may be possessed of."

It is needless to say such an exordium secured him the most instantaneous and absorbed attention.

"It is about Max?"—a glad light coming into her eyes.

"No, Max has nothing whatever to do it. It is about yourself."

"Myself! It is something stupid, then. You are going to scold. But go on: I can stand it."

"Certainly you can. There are very few things one cannot stand in this world if one would only call his head instead of his heart to his assistance. But let me get on. A little while back—while you were down at the place, in fact—a lady called on Miss Morgan and astonished her vastly by telling her that she was Mrs. William Staunton and that she wanted her daughter, Delphine Staunton. Come, don't quiver like a little frightened bird; listen bravely and act sensibly.

"Miss Morgan demanded proofs and an explanation. She gave them. First, in form of a letter of introduction from your guardian; then by showing her wedding ring and marriage certificate.

"Her story, corroborated by a letter of your father's, which he directed should be read only in the present contingency, is this: She lost her mind, temporarily, by the murder of her father. On her recovery she received news of the death of her husband, which threw her already weakened mind again off the balance, and she was consigned for a second and longer period to the asylum. Immediately on her recovery she came to find her child. We have declined telling you anything about this matter until we had satisfied ourselves. This morning a letter direct from M. Brousseau to Miss Morgan has settled all doubts. You have seen your mother, little girl, and you said you could not endure her. You will look at her differently now. She has seen much trouble. We will begin by treating her with respectful courtesy, and end, I hope, by loving her."

Short, concise, with no appeal to feel-

ings on anybody's part, had Judge Weyland purposely made his statement. He knew that the tragic element was in his story, and if he admitted the slightest touch of melo-drama into his recital, tears, hysterics, a scene, must be the inevitable result. He intentionally froze a sensational development into a matter-of-fact affair, to be taken into matter-of-fact consideration.

He reasoned in a stoical fashion about the absurdity of working oneself up into a perfect tempest of grief or joy or emotion of any sort over every ripple that stirred the glassy surface of life's monotonous current.

But Delphine had not reached the icy altitude of his philosophy. There was disgust, horror and consternation in the large eyes fastened almost imploringly on his face.

"That woman my mother! And I must go away wherever she sees fit to take me?"

"Go away? Bless me, no. The poor mother only asks to stay with you."

"But she owns me now. And I must obey her. And—and—oh! Uncle Weyland, the horrible sin of it—I hate her!"

"Hate her! Child, that little pure soul of yours does not know how to hate. You are prodigal of adjectives; that is the worst sin you have committed so far."

She did not answer: she was revolving this tremendous surprise in her mind. Queerly an element of comfort evolved itself from the chaotic thoughts. Yesterday this information would have produced unqualified misery; today she hated this woman, she was morally sure of that; but it took away a little of the forlorn feeling, so new, that she did not belong to any one. How her emotions contradicted each other! She belonged to this woman and owed her submissive obedience, and hated her for that obligation; she belonged to this woman, and they would go quietly down to the old place, away from Max, to whom she had proven a calamity, and live—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

The woes of sixteen are incurable save by utter and immediate renunciation of this hollow, hollow, hollow world! Yes, she would renounce the world. Her resolution was taken. Having a mother would materially enhance the respectability of this renunciation—thus mentally.

"She will take me from Nonee and Evelyn and"—thus hysterically.

"Max. Do not fear to add him. He is the best and truest sort of fellow."

An unsolicited and unaccountable kiss was suddenly pressed on the rough cheek of the speaker. Contact with the Judge's unshaven chin left the kisser wondrously pink about the brow and cheeks.

"Oh! Uncle Weyland, what must I do?"

"Behave like a sensible, brave girl."

"If she only did not look mean. Her eyes are cowardly."

"Your's are imaginative."

"But she will want to kiss me, and I feel as if a snake was coiling about me, if she does but lay her bony hand on my arm."

"Well, there are but two plans open to you. Let us examine both. 'Your mother has been unfortunate, she has been separated from her child through many years; she is restored and comes to that child, hoping to find in her society forgetfulness of a long series of troubles. Whether or not she shall do so rests altogether with you, her daughter. That daughter can receive her kindly, treat her respectfully, and give her liberal opportunity to win more than bare filial respect; or she can play the vixen, deny what all her friends have taken pains to have amply proven before allowing the poor woman one caress from the baby she nourished from her own bosom, and give a deal of trouble to all who love her.'"

"I shall not do that, Uncle Weyland. I shall be sensible and quiet. But, oh! oh! you've not made one bit of account of my being torn from the people and the home I have loved ever since I could love anything."

"I have taken it into account and I pity you for that more than for anything else. But that is one of the hard inevitables which are to test your bravery."

This putting the girl on her mettle, as it were, was a wise move on Judge Weyland's part. He had said just enough, he thought, and not caring to say too much he got up and went away, telling her of the arrangement made with Mr. Morgan.

He closed the door and hurried away. Cool as he was, philosophical as he wanted to be, the heart-wrung sobs that smote upon his ears through the closed

door penetrated to a soft place somewhere under his vest and melted him into very unphilosophic pity.

The Judge's lady was as much of a philosopher in her line as was her husband. She was opposed, in an æsthetic way, to worry of any sort. Care created crow's-feet; worry wrought wrinkles. So as long as the Judge and Paul kept in health, and Providence moved in a mysterious way which kept her well in pocket-money, all other ills were minor and endurable evils. She pitied the child—the woman was certainly altogether superfluous. She was inevitable, though, and they would all have to make the best of her. Dear me, what a stew it would throw poor Maria into. She must go up stairs and pet Niecy into a good humor before six o'clock.

Six o'clock came.

Somewhat nervously Judge Weyland received his punctual guests. He doubted much if his carefully instilled stoicism had not long since been washed away in floods of tears.

If heart beats could make themselves heard, what a tumult there would have been in the elegant parlors of Mrs. Judge Weyland while they were all waiting for Delphine. Her quick, light foot-fall was heard presently, a resolute touch turned the door-handle, and she stood upon the threshold. Her face was white to pallor, with dark, tell-tale rings about her eyes. For full a second she stood there motionless, gazing into the darkened room with startled eyes, catching her breath quickly as might a swimmer just about to plunge into unknown depths; then resolutely, that pretty head of hers held proudly erect, she came toward the group with the air of a young princess.

What would not Maxwell Morgan have given to have met that white-faced princess midway of the long room, to have folded his strong arms about the form that he knew was trembling in spite of its resolute bearing, and have snatched this bitter cup from his darling's lips. But this he could not do; so he just sat still, watching the girl with eyes full of admiration and a heart full of pitying love.

Straight up to the stranger she walked and held out her hand, saying in a voice sweet and clear, but not perfectly firm:

"I know all about it. You are my mother. Uncle Weyland has told r

your story. You have had a sad life—I will try to make the remainder of it brighter. Don't let us talk any about the past; please let us begin from today." Then bowing her proud head, she submitted dutifully to the rapturous kisses showered by her intense mother upon her eyes, her lips and her cheeks.

Suddenly the thin arms relaxed their fervid embrace, a gurgling sound, a gasp, and Mrs. Staunton fell gently back against the soft sofa cushions in a well-executed swoon.

"Is she dead?" shrieked Delphine, young and genuine, witnessing the first performance of the sort.

"She has swooned," said Aunt Catherine, coolly; "your mother is of a highly emotional nature and comes from an emotional people. Judge, will you call Maurice?"

With Maurice's assistance Judge Weyland bore the limp form up to his wife's bed-chamber, Aunt Catherine following and Delphine, promptly assuming the filial, rising to do the same.

"Stop, Delphine; there are enough to attend to her," and Max, laying his hand on her arm drew her to a seat on the sofa by him. In his wicked heart he felt grateful for the combination of weak nerves and strong emotion which had cleared the parlors of all but her and himself.

"You know, now, why I called you a calamity. If you had never come to us, we should never have had to give you up. Your going is our calamity. Oh, little one, how can we fill up the blank you are leaving; I had hoped we were all to be together for a life-time. It was a foolish hope, for we had no right to you. You were only given us in charge for a while—it seems such a little while. But in that while you've twined yourself so closely about our hearts that it is giving a terrible wrench to separate us. But I did not detain you here to talk of our feelings. As your guardians, Eleanor and I have talked with your mother. You are to live together at the old place. You will not be so far from me but that in case of need you can send for me. Promise me, child, that in such case you will always remember that I love you and will be happy in serving your interests. Promise that in any important move you may contemplate such as—marriage, for instance, you will allow those who have loved you and cared

for you ever since you were brought to them a little crying orphan, a voice in the matter."

But she could promise nothing, her arms were about his neck, and convulsive sobs shook her whole form.

Raising the wet face from his shoulder, Max pressed one lingering kiss upon the quivering lips, put her gently from him and left without waiting to bid anybody else good-by.

The Judge and the Judge's lady and the resuscitated Mrs Staunton returning to the parlor after a while, found no one there but a dismal-faced young lady trying very hard to look glad at having found something, when she was feeling very sad at having lost everything.

CHAPTER XVII.

HERESY IN HIGH PLACES.

"If this be treason, make the most of it!"
—Patrick Henry.

Mrs. St. John Ames sat sewing and thinking.

Sewing and thinking! A dual performance only possible to those who lived before the immortal Howe rescued woman's spine at the expense of her reflective powers.

In this age of iron, dreamland (like the nation's reserve for a worsted people) is being pushed farther and still farther out upon the confines of the possible, until it shall have reached the border of the impossible. For, with one's feet in vigorous play upon the iron treadles; one's hands engaged in the ceaseless effort to follow obediently where once one guided arbitrarily; one's eyes prisoners to the relentless necessity for watchfulness; brain whirling with the whirling wheel; nerves on tension concerning the tension; what time or space for imagination's play? Since sewing has been exalted (?) into the region of the mechanical arts reverie has fled the noisy arena. The iron needle has stitched fancy's shroud and reflection has sunk into the background to bide the moment of idleness.

I cannot but send a sigh after the dead hours, when women plied the slower moving needle noiselessly and drew the thread to and fro, weaving about it bright conceits, tender regrets, joyous fancies, as if it were the fateful thread of life instead of a frail filament bind-

ing together a perishable thing. I love to think of the volumes of unwritten needle lore stitched into garments the moth has fallen heir to by the generations of women gone or grown faded and old.

There is pathos in every fold of the christening robe, which a mother's tender hands have wrought into perfection. How her gentle soul went wandering into the dreamy future, as the thread went travelling in and out the cambric meshes, weaving bright fancies about the future, when her babe with the pink, aimless fists and the wonder-stretched eyes, was to stand a king among men!

There is pathos in the rosy pictures that the bride of the by-gone time stitched into the dainty fabrics that were to adorn the person made sacred in her eyes, since beautiful in his. Could these pictures, needle-woven like the Gobelin tapestries, take on shape and color, would they glisten with the bright hues of fruition or show faded as a musty shroud?

There is pathos in the dreams of conquest woven into every fold of her dainty wardrobe by the conqueror of sixteen, dreaming with down-dropt eyes and flushing cheeks of the conquests possible only to beauty adorned!

There was pathos in the pale face of the minister's wife as she drew her old-fashioned needle steadily in and out through the folds of cross-barred muslin, that was to eventuate in a new something for Susie. It seemed to her on that day as if life itself was hardly more than a vast web of cross-bars, in which the lines of duty were being forever cross-barred by the lines of desire, making the problem that had troubled her whole existence—what ought one to do—more difficult of solution than ever.

Mr. Ames had asked her a question that morning, had repeated one, rather, which he had been asking at irregular intervals since their firstborn had been fairly launched upon life's yeasty current:

"Maria, what shall we do with that boy?"

This was a stock question with the Rev. Mr. Ames, which it was safe to predict on days like the one under consideration. A dreary November day, when the rain came dashing against the rectory windows in a gusty sobbing fash-

ion, as if the very elements saw occasion to lament over that boy.

It was a cheerful habit of the grave minister's to improve the hours (which the inclemency of the weather prevented his devoting to a six-mile constitutional) during which he was forced into more immediate juxtaposition with his family, by compiling for the tender-hearted mother's benefit a profusion of irrefragable proofs that the darling of her heart was a ne'er-do-weel.

Poor Gus's latest sin was one of omission. He liked the place where Sunday and the Bible were tabooed so well that he still tarried there with Paul, still despatched promissory notes home, and still continued to dishonor the same.

This rainy day had been the most recently appointed one for his return, and his failure to do so had renewed in his father the ever-latent desire to know what he should do with that boy.

And though the minister's wife always looked sympathetic and tried with her weak woman's brain to solve the problem unsolvable by his strong man's brain, she always failed. In fact she did not see that they were called upon to do anything in particular with that boy, except to love him and to try to keep him in the way he should go—she binding him with the silken cord of pitying affection where the father would rivet the iron chains of duty.

The Rev. Mr. Ames was not the first father who, having clothed and fed a being for whose presence upon this troubled sphere he was responsible for twenty-one years, carried him through a moral and mental curriculum, governed all the independance out of him, frowned down every flicker of self-reliance, gazes with wonder at the bungling work of his own hands and asks with dissatisfaction, "What shall I do with him?"

The minister of Wickam Church, cold and gray as the stones of which that church was built, was as pure of heart and as spotless of life as the Master in whose name he uttered his fierce philippics against sin and the shadow of sin, embracing the broad field of peccadillo reaching out to the dark ground of schism and the unpardonable sin.

On the day upon which he donned the robes of office in his heart and almost in his life he renounced the world, the flesh and the devil. Too complete a renunciation for the good of those ~~and~~

tined to his stern keeping, whose welfare demanded that, as pastor, he should guide them through the labyrinths of that world he held at such a scornful distance, should fight the fleshly fight side by side with them, and should intervene between them and the devil he professed to have put to flight the shield of his own immaculateness.

Conscientiously and faithfully had he fed his flock upon the best and ripest fruits of orthodoxy, watering them from the same fountain at which the patriarchs of old drank and grew strong, and yet here, from the very centre of the fold, peered out the disheartening spectacle of a black sheep, and he knew not what to do with him. An unregenerate sheep—and whose fault was it that the sheep was black and unregenerate?

To defy the elements, to leave his fire-side at the very time when ordinary folks would have hugged it closest, to plunge unhesitatingly through mud-holes at which the majority of bipeds would have stared stupidly, while devising means of circumventing them, seemed to exhilarate the Rev. St. John. Maybe it inspired him with a feeling of superiority over other folks, a feeling which has an exhilarating effect even upon gentlemen who have renounced the flesh and the devil. On this dreary day he was sure of finding Weyland housed and slipped; it was an excellent opportunity to have a talk with him about their two boys.

So he shouldered his umbrella as if it were a musket and he the chief of an attacking party, and plunged into the outer damp and discomfort, leaving Mrs. Ames to sew and think.

Her husband had startled her, that morning, into the novel position of actual antagonism to himself, not only in thought but in words. In consequence of which he had left the house in a frame of mind which, in a layman, would have been called "huffy."

He had suggested whitening the black sheep by putting him in authority over other sheep. In short, he had said, "Let us train him for the pulpit."

The mother bristling all over with a sense of the fitness of things, had said with wonderful courage and decision for her, "No."

Whereupon, with a few more tart remarks, the pastor had gone away from *her to seek counsel where there was bet-*

ter chance of getting it. And the mother had picked up the cross-barred muslin she was fashioning, and though at first through the salt tears the cross looked very plain and the bars very decided, as her needle moved mechanically to and fro, Augustus's future—crossed by his own turbulence and his father's harshness—seemed somehow to regulate itself or to be regulated by some unseen agency. So that by the time she was turning in the ravelled edge to form a neatly symmetrical hem, she found herself with a lightened heart gathering up all the jagged ends of her boy's mis-spent days and broken resolves; tucking the rough loose edges out of sight, folding deeper and deeper until she reached the firm basis of his good sense and noble impulses; and there she wove her bright tapestry picture of his reformation, transfiguring a mother's hope into a son's promise; building thereupon bright anticipations; anticipations as firm and as foundationless as a mother's love, for her ever-reforming, never-reformed boy. But that unseen agency by which Augustus was to be regenerated and whitened was not the pulpit.

Augustus in the ministry! Never with her consent. There were too many there now who had much better be elsewhere. She had seen so much of ministers since she had been a minister's wife that she was more than ever disposed to look upon it as a calling. Let him who felt a Divine inspiration to guide his stumbling blind fellow-creatures safely over the snares and pit-falls that beset their path-way, a yearning over the weak and erring, let him who had learned to feel another's woe enter upon the awful position of a brother's keeper.

She knew it was the fashion to say, "your minister is a man like yourself, of like passions and like temptations; You have no right to expect more of him than from another. But she did not think that was a true way of putting the matter. She thought that when a man came forward professedly ready to guide her, by perilous and unknown ways, into the far-away country she yearned to reach, she certainly had a right to demand that he should know the road better than herself, not that he should go stumbling along by her side, guessing at the road; she had a right to demand that he should spend a good-

ly portion of his time studying the map of that country, and making himself master of the route; she had a right to demand wakeful vigilance on his part, even though she, weak and wavering, slept the sleep of the sluggard; abstinence on his part, though she faltered and stretched out her inexperienced hand for the luscious fruit hanging temptingly over her head, sweet but deadly.

It was a dread an awful responsibility he took upon himself who assumed the guardianship of a fellow-creature's soul. A responsibility to be entered into with fear and trembling; an undertaking calling for all the strength, all the courage, all the exaltation of soul impossible in finite man. Should her son Augustus swell the already stupendous list of bunglers?

Then through a secret chamber of her soul, a chamber where reason sat in gentle judgment, there passed a ghostly array of the unfit, on through the council chamber out to execution by the Bridge of Sighs, thence into oblivion; for it was only to her own soul that Mrs. Ames dare acknowledge the possibility of unfitness in one of the anointed. Not in wrath, but in pitying tenderness did she pass her verdict of unworthy upon a sad majority.

She was too truly loyal and too thoroughly saturated with all the good advice which that saintly celibate Paul has expended for the security of other men's domestic peace, not to bow in orthodox reverence before the fitness of the Rev. St. John Ames. She could not doubt that he was fitted by reason of his great learning, his self-abnegation and his exalted superiority to every and any human weakness, for the stern office of guide.

How unlike him had been that slender, trim, little minister in the parish of St. Dennis, who had worn his gold-rimmed eye-glasses jauntily, had courted every girl of wealth persistently, and had such an inexhaustible stock of dubious stories to tell. She had always thought a good dancing-master had been spoiled to make a poor clergyman.

And that handsome Mr. Fletcher, tall and muscular, who was always most tenderly concerned about the welfare of the souls whose owners were known to keep good tables; a *bon vivant*, who said grace at the beginning of the meal with solemn

reverence and enlivened its progress with the spiciest gossip-sugaring malice, with pious deprecation. She wanted always to strip his robes from him, giving him in exchange for his surplice a colonel's epaulettes, placing him at the head of a mess-table, where his handsome face and dainty malice would be properly appreciated.

And the Rev. Larcher, coming straight down from a Puritan stock, endowed with the wisdom of a Solomon, the eloquence of a Demosthenes, swaying the people at his own burning will, bowed down to in worshipping reverence; an idol of clay, saying to his worshippers in clarion tones, 'Be thou perfect, even as thy Father in Heaven is perfect,' taking for his own model of perfection the sweet singer whose morality was of an order to have closed every decent modern door in his reverend face.

Was it any wonder that the ranks of the scoffer swelled daily and grew jubilant, when the temple was so defiled?

She had a systematic woman's dislike of seeing any good material spoiled in the working up. Hence her regret that the Rev. Juniper Jones should have marred a good craftsman to make a poor clergyman; he preached only a tolerable sermon, but his method of mending old cups was beyond criticism. How frightened and uncomfortable he looked if a theological point not explainable by the rubric was started in his presence, but give him a paint-pot and brush and he glowed with the fires of inspiration. If not able to throw much mental light upon Scriptural texts he had no compeer in illuminating them manually. What an acquisition he would have been to a first-class variety store!

She would not go on. Her task afforded her no pleasure. It sickened her to think of the army of slovens to whom the Master's work was entrusted. She knew that this analytical soliloquy of hers would lay her open to the charge of the blackest treason; that the cabalistic word Reverend, as well as the badge of the black-coat, were held to exalt their owner above the sphere of criticism, beyond the reach of condemnation. But so long as offences came, woe be to him by whom they came.

She loved her Church, she loved her God, and she loved the host of pure, earnest, Christ-like men, the good and faithful servants who rendered the Master

honest service. There was no treason in her heart, it was full of righteous indignation. It would be held a merit in him discovering a quack dispensing drugs fatal to the physical life to proclaim that quack in the street-corner, and on the house tops. What measures then, should be meted to him who killed the spiritual life?

But what could she do? Not much, perhaps, save prevent one more incapable from going into the Church to make a living. It might be an easier way of maintaining oneself than by manual labor, or a more respectable way than driving an honest trade of any sort; but if the searching test of fitness for the post was brought to bear upon every aspirant for pulpit service she believed that the ranks of the laborer would be swelled and many a pulpit left empty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTAINS ARGUMENTS WHICH CONVINCE NO ONE.

"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."—*Luke*.

Arrived at the Judge's mansion, cold and rain-beaten, the Rev. Mr. Ames gave renewed evidence of his superiority to all carnal appetites by his lofty rejection of a glass of hot negus, hospitably pressed upon him by his sister-in-law, to drive out, as she said, the cold he must have absorbed during his walk.

"Thank you, Catharine, no," he said, with a "Get-thee-behind-me,-Satan," look; then went plunging into the subject on his mind, as he had just gone plunging into the mud-holes at the street crossings, with a sort of fierce disregard for others' feelings and his own boots.

"Wesley Weyland, do you know that you and I are charged with an awful responsibility?"

"Why, no! Bless my soul! Who's gone to perdition now under our pilotage?"

"I speak of our boys."

"Our boys! Oh, they are chronic. But as an auctioneer of lost souls, I am afraid you are not a success, Ames. To my certain knowledge those two boys of ours have been going, going, going on the road to ruin ever since they scared poor Miss Nancy Watkin's wig on end with their stuffed snake nonsense, and they are tolerably respectable members of society yet."

The soul auctioneer had long since discovered the utter inutility of trying to frown down the airy levity of this man of the world. So when discussing serious matters with him he wisely confined himself rigidly to the text of his discourse, trusting to Providence to see that some of the seed sown in this rocky soil might take root and bear good fruit.

"Do you never ask yourself what is to become of your son Paul?"

"Never. I never ask idle questions, especially when there is no prospect of having them satisfactorily answered. It is unlawyerlike, not to say stupid."

"With me it is a subject of profound and ever-recurring anxiety."

"I can vouch for the ever-recurring."

"And it astonishes me to see a man of your brain and culture treat it with such unpardonable levity."

"I beg your pardon, my dear St. John, but if a man of your brain and culture, with the superior lights on the subject which of course your profession furnishes, has been grappling with this awful question ever since your first-born was buttoned into his first trousers, with no satisfactory results, all the heavenly allies assisting you, too, what could I do, miserable, broken cistern that I am? But is there any fresh development of depravity on the part of our sons?"

"New, no. The old is bad enough. Idleness, aimlessness, thoughtlessness, two men drifting, towards the shores eternal with no more thought for the welfare of their souls than if they were two cockle-shells."

"What an uncomfortably serious way you clergymen have of putting things. I should think such continuous and sombre reflection would really impair your digestive organs. Now Mrs. Weyland and I do sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and fall to talking about our boy. We think him a splendid fellow, of course. Upright, gentlemanly, the soul of honor, we don't apprehend any very calamitous fate for him, if he will only remain true to himself. We discuss his proclivities between ourselves. She says she would like to see him prominent as a public speaker, oratory—a little Demosthenes, you know—but I tell her he lacks two requisites for success as a public speaker—a deuced good opinion of himself and a correspondingly poor one of everybody else. I say I would like to see him an eminent jurist, but it

makes no difference what his choice is to be, talent accompanied by industry must command success. In fact we waste a good many minutes talking about that boy; but we never liken him unto a cockle-shell, nor do we impair our excellent appetites by unwholesome brooding over the shores eternal."

"But to what do you destine him?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Do you mean me to understand, Weyland, that because you have amassed a competence by your brain and industry, and his mother owns a little property in the country, Paul is to eat the bread of idleness all his days?"

"Bless my soul, what an Inference! You asked me what I destined the boy for, and I answered 'nothing.' But I have too good an opinion of my son to fear his eating the bread of idleness, Paul is a man and a free agent. He has not yet fully made up his own mind. But I can wait. I think, Mr. Ames, that the majority of boys are ruined in this world by the intermeddling propensities of their parents.

"During the helpless years of his childhood, I took the best possible care of the boy, physically. When his mind began to develop I gave him every opportunity possible for its cultivation. As for his moral training, you would say he had none. I have instilled the principles of a gentleman into him, which principles involve honor and honesty, admiration for all that is admirable, contempt for all that is contemptible. *No-blesse oblige* is his creed and he acts up to it like a man.

"As a man he must take his place by my side in the arena of life, deciding upon his own course of action and abiding by that decision; I will not take upon myself the tremendous responsibility of shaping any man's course for him. The benefit of my experience and advice he shall always gladly receive—but no dictation.

"We will fight the fight out side by side as two men who love and esteem each other. He young and ardent, I old and calmed down. And it makes me proud to think that when the older arm grows powerless and feeble, there will be a lusty young contestant to prop it up, maybe. But I will not hamper him; I lay no stress upon what the boy owes

me. What he accords to me must be a voluntary offering, no sacrificial duty."

"The most remarkable position for a father to assume!"

"Perhaps! My position, then, according to you, has at least the merit of originality."

"A doubtful merit."

"I am only sorry for your son's sake that you and I cannot agree in this matter."

"I was regretting the position you have assumed entirely for your son's sake."

"Very well, we have disposed of my cockle-shell. Now, since we are settling things for two men without their voices or consent, what do you propose to make of your cockle?"

"I want him to enter the ministry."

"The ministry. Has he expressed any desire in that direction?"

"None; nor in any other. Therefore it becomes my imperious duty to decide for him."

"Decide for him! It appears to me, good brother St. John, that the levity which you accuse me of bringing to bear upon the awful responsibility you say we are charged with is very neatly offset by the presumptuous way in which you handle it."

"Presumptuous! Weyland, your choice of terms is both inexplicable and offensive."

"Inexplicable' I need not long remain; 'offensive' I never desire to be, St. John, as you must surely have learned in our many discussions, wherein, although almost invariably differing from you in your views of moral matters, I have endeavored to show the utmost consideration for your pet prejudices."

"Prejudices! Do you so denominate a man's religious opinions?"

"What better are your inherited ideas, your stock opinions, your musty creeds, but the accumulated prejudices of centuries? Has one atom been added to your code of morals, one single step been made to keep pace with the march of events, one fresh idea advanced, since the days of Moses?"

"The Church's code of morals, handed down pure and undefiled, as it has been, through a glorious succession of apostles, is perfect. Adding an atom would be 'To gild refined gold, to paint the lily.' One single step forward is not needed where Divine omniscience has placed

the Church upon a pinnacle of advancement and perfection to which the world, in its whizzing march of events, can never hope to attain. The perfect cannot be improved, the complete needs no addition."

"Your code of morals—perfect, probably, as far as it reaches—was formed in the infancy of the world. You complain of new phases of wickedness, new developments in crime daily. New diseases call for new remedies. What man of medicine would apply a last year's mustard plaster to this year's cramp? Your mouldy homilies are no more efficacious than last year's plasters; they lack vitality, pungency."

"You err. It is but the universal vitiation of morals which makes the pure, simple dicta of the Church unpalatable."

"No, St. John; this is undeniably an age of intellectual activity, the Renaissance of thought and enquiry. Science is not illiberal nor discourteous; she is simply unfeeling and does not entertain the traditional reverence for the cloth. She will give you a fair showing but no quarter. And unless the Church can shake off her drowsy conservatism and devise some means of keeping pace with the lusty young giant progress, she must resign herself to sink into the background, mildly content with a feeble constituency of women who prefer to do their thinking by proxy, and children too young to think at all."

"Your modest request that the Church should descend from her position of sublime security to devise means for overtaking the lusty young genius of progress, would find a parallel if you, a judge, honored in your profession, secure in your position, should descend from your bench to settle a point in litigation by a foot-race with the litigant. Better for the Church and for the world if we could return to the days of pure morals and simple creeds, when the patriarch's word was the law to the family."

"Better perhaps for the patriarchs, but a little hard, don't you think, on the family."

"According to your novel ideas, perhaps." But it would simplify matters in my present extremity."

"To go back to the days of the patriarchs might reinforce your authority, but it would certainly not purify your son's morals."

"I am afraid I am in the befogged con-

dition you claim for the Church, for I fail to catch your meaning."

"I mean that if you or I should have chosen to get tipsy and play the rowdy, according to nineteenth century notions, we would be pronounced vindictive brutes if we cursed one of our boys eternally and condemned him to life-long servitude, for commenting upon our shortcomings, as did your venerable exemplar Noah. "I mean that, degenerate as these days are, there are not many men who would emulate Father Abraham's example, who cast his own flesh and blood out into the wilderness to perish, with the handsome provision of a loaf of bread and a bottle of water. "And, as rapidly as you think our two cockle-shells are going to the dogs, would either one of them be capable of deceiving a blind old man by tying goat-skins over his scampish fists, passing off kid for venison, and lying his way into a blessing intended for another man, as that high-toned gentleman, Jacob, did? As for the rest of that old-time lot, I think it doubtful if a single one of them would be admitted to membership in any modern club where a man has to prove himself a gentleman before he can come in."

"To argue these points successfully, Weyland, it is necessary that I should first ask you one question. Do you, as your utterances indicate, reject the Bible *in toto*?"

"I do. I regard the Old Testament as a record of evil-doing, a biography of immoral characters. By attaching it to the New Testament you Bible propagandists have done your cause incalculable harm. If I had a daughter, and the perusal of one involved the other, she should be prohibited from reading both."

"Then there is no argument possible between us. I take my stand on the Bible; I draw my conclusions from its pages. It was not to discuss the old, threadbare theological points that I came here today. The Bible has withstood the attacks of generations of pigmies before yours, without losing value or sacredness in eyes not so blinded by self-conceit as to be able to recognize it as an inspired volume. It was with the barren hope of being able to benefit your son Paul that I came over this morning."

"To be sure, to be sure. Bless my soul, we have wandered a long way off—all the way from Paul Weyland and Augustus Ames to Noah. But to return to the boys. Let me, on the principle of the devil quoting Scripture, advise you to take no thought of your boy's morrow; not upon theological grounds of want of faith, but upon the purely secular footing of its utter inutility. For rest assured that rough hew his ends as you may, there is a destiny that will shape them in spite of you, and I think, most like, that destiny will come in crinoline and high-heeled boots."

"A woman!" No love-disappointed anchorite could have thrown more alarm into two words.

"A woman! yes, and God bless the girls as the sweetest, purest, most omnipotent allies that fathers of sons can possibly have in keeping those sons pure and strong."

"This must be looked into. A foolish marriage would cap the trouble that boy has already given me. One last word in duty I must speak. Curb your boy, Weyland, else he and all your advanced theories will come to grief."

"Thank you, St. John; you mean well and I respect you, if I do not your opinions. But let me beg you to accept one presumptuous piece of advice; lengthen your boy's tether Ames; give him a freer range; or the day will come when he will think to have been a cockle-shell an improvement on his own condition, and will drift toward the shores eternal cursing rather than blessing those who presumed upon parental authority to cramp him into a machine."

The minister of Wickam Church went plodding homeward through the mud and rain in that depressed frame of mind which renders so sadly patent the vanity of all things here below.

Had he been preaching Christ and Him crucified for more than a quarter of a century to such small purpose that his pulpit should be pronounced a charnel house for dead ideas, and himself threatened with a feeble constituency of women and young children!

He longed for the gift of miracle-working, that he might convert the chill water of scepticism into the soul-warming wine of faith; that he might heal the leper of infidelity by one magic touch, calm the tempest of free thought by a

word, render harmless the viper of irreligion in the fervid fires of eloquence. But the days when Omnipotence chose to manifest itself in miraculous ways were gone by; passed away with the era of blind credulity—dead with the race of simple believers.

Fancy Wesley Weyland, a wedding-guest at Cana, critically eying the converted water and expressing himself with characteristic freedom respecting the mode of its conversion; or commenting satirically upon the doubtful kindness shown Simon in the miraculous cure of his fever-stricken mother-in-law; or discussing the bolts and bars of Peter's prison door, angel opened, with the coarse practicaity of a locksmith! The fancy was anachronistic, his longing was folly. There was but one thing to do. Fight the good fight out to the bitter end, on primitive Scriptural ground, without flinching, without repining. He would die in the harness he had buckled on with resolute hands on the day of his ordination.

Maybe that harness was old-fashioned and clumsy for these advanced times; it might be that his chain-mail armor was rusty and cumbrous and his grey head might bend wearily under the weight of his obsolete helmet. But the battle-axe of his father's was a powerful and trusty weapon, and with it he would continue to deal manful blows at the rampant spirit of infidelity until the arm that wielded it should be stiffened by death.

So the genius of conservatism passed in under the dripping cedars into the presence of his wife. And the wife—catching with the quick eye of affection the look of depression and soul-weariness on that stern face, so dear in spite of its sternness—rose quickly up, putting away her sadness with her cross-barred fabric, ceasing to think of her own heart burdens, ceasing to ponder over her boy's probable destiny; remembering only that St. John was sitting there before her, pale and dispirited, in need of that wifely ministration and womanly tendance which is balm and consolation to the stoniest heart that beats.

And I do not believe that even St. John Ames's heart was so stony that in that time of softening sadness he did not realize that she was more precious than rubies, and that all the things he could desire were not to be compared unto her.

CHAPTER XIX.

DESTINY IN HIGH-HEELED BOOTS.

"A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command."
— Wordsworth.

While the Rev. St. John Ames was disquieting himself in vain over the possible future of his son and nephew, the two objects of that disquietude were finding the actual present so satisfying, that their thoughts seldom travelled far into the debatable land of the hereafter.

M. Emile Girardeau, with his perfect manners and his imperfect English, had imported into their days a flavor of novelty highly acceptable, in gratitude for which he was made to feel very welcome by his young host. What with hunting and boating and ten-pin rolling and good dinners and unexceptionable cigars, and no one to say to them "so far and no farther," the hours glided into days and the days into weeks, without either of them caring to decide upon the time which must put a period to this sort of *sans-souci* existence.

To do them full justice, they did sometimes, between wine and cigars, discuss the future in a flippant masterful fashion, making no more of the traditional stumbling blocks on the road to fame than they did of airy globules chasing each other over the surface of their wine, flinging obstacles out of their way with as much ease as they flipped their cigar-ash into nothingness. The generations of men who had gone before them and succumbed to adverse fortune had been spoonneys and nincompoops. But when they entered the arena they would change all that.

In the meanwhile they would gird their loins for the contest in cashmere dressing-gowns with silken linings, strengthen their souls with the best green-seal, clear their wits with the choicest Havanas, Paul allaying conscience when she threatened too sharp a prick, by declaring that it was high time he was having that solemn and fate-deciding talk with father, which was to be the initial step to business; Augustus despatching a fresh note, beginning: "Dear mother, I will certainly be home this coming week;" the Frenchman declaring every morning with fluctuating degrees of resolution that "this would ~~never~~ do. He was poor, he must to he had not cross the wide seas to

play at gentleman of leisure and drink champagne with two *bon camarades*. This great American country was kind, it beckoned to the poor of every clime, and promised them help. He had come for his share of her good things; he would have it."

Whereupon Paul, taking a sort of patron's supervision over the young foreigner crossing the sea invoiced to him, as it were, enquired into the style of occupation he sought.

Finding that a drawing and French class would fill the measure of his ambition, Paul suggested that the Rev. Mr. Samuels would be the person to assist them in this matter. Thus a series of visits to the parsonage had been inaugurated, during which the acquaintance begun at Delphine's house between the minister's pretty sister and the young men from the Lodge had been improved until, as might have been expected, three idle young men found themselves furiously in love with one sweet girl.

The epidemic manifested its presence characteristically in the case of each individual sufferer.

Paul turned his attention critically to the quantity of starch in his shirt bosom and the degree of polish attained by his boots. He whistled

"If ever I cease to love,"

in his clearest, gayest voice, as he stood before his glass in the morning, wondering if it would be an improvement to remove the parting of his hair just a little, not much, toward the middle of his head, rising superior to such afflictions as muddy coffee or belated dinners, dealing tenderly with the shortcomings of cooks and all other sinners, out of the fulness of his own content.

Mr. Ames's darkly handsome face took on a shade of tender melancholy, his bosom's woe seeking relief by scarifying the trees with hearts, fearfully and wonderfully made, stabbed by darts of doubtful proportions; piercing the flesh of cactus leaves to register his affection in a monogram wherein an attenuated L meandered helplessly about the supporting curves of a very fat S.

The Frenchman grew garrulous, vain-glorious and suspicious.

In the inmost recesses of his soul, each party was buoyed up by a hop so confident as to leave plenty of room for pity for the others.

Delphine's sojourn at the homestead had simplified matters for them. Her house affording a convenient camping ground for the attacking party, where they could call a halt, examine the varnish of their boots, convince themselves of the absolute perfection of their shirt fronts, and make the assurance of a faultless cravat-bow doubly sure, before making a sortie.

But Delphine had suddenly commanded her vassal Dan to take her back to Wickam, and for more than a week now no shadow of excuse had offered for the triumvirate to make another demonstration.

A week! Seven whole days without even a glimpse of the Lady Bank's rose that clambered about her window. Mortal men could stand no more. The eighth would reduce them all to a state of hopeless imbecility.

On the morning of that eighth, Paul brought matters to a crisis with a question; a question evolved apparently from a careful and deliberate investigation of the contents of an egg-shell, the cap of which he had struck skilfully off with his knife.

"Girardeau, was it not Tuesday the Rev. Mr. Samuels appointed for you to come over to meet some of the parties proposing to form your class?"

"Thursday," M. Girardeau said promptly.

"No, Tuesday; I am sure it was Tuesday, and your French ears converted it into Thursday."

"When all the time," said Augustus, grinning sardonically, "he said 'Friday,' which your American ears, queerly enough, have twisted into Tuesday."

"Friday! There is some mistake here."

"Several, I should say."

"It would be terrible for the people to be there, Tuesday, and Girardeau not there to meet them."

"Terrible!"—in concert from both his hearers.

"So to be on the safe side we had better ride over this morning."

His proposition found favor; he being willing to risk the error for the sake of a word with Lucy. The Frenchman willing to be driven over two days in advance of his appointment for the same sufficient reason, and Augustus sublimely indifferent to the ridiculous figure they would all cut—three men not

able to bear correctly in mind an appointed day—so that he might surreptitiously possess himself of a cutting from the rose bush that embowered her sacred window.

In palliation, not in extenuation of such mental obliquity, let it be recorded that Mr. Samuels had said, in that quiet low voice of his:—"Wednesday, then let it be, gentlemen"—just as his sister, bewildering from the topmost crinkle of her wavy yellow hair, to the toe of her small rosetted bronze slippers, had glided into the room, filling three souls with ecstasy and emptying three heads of wits, at the first glance of her big, innocent blue eyes.

"There!" says Paul triumphantly, "I told you it was Tuesday!" Irrefragible proof that it was Tuesday, being furnished by a family carriage of aristocratic antiquity, drawn by a pair of sobered contemporaneous horses, standing quietly before the Parsonage gate.

The Lodge equipage dashed gallantly to the front, Paul putting his handsome bays upon their mettle, secretly hoping that Miss Samuels might accidentally be behind some of the curtains ready to admire his horse, his wagon and—the driver.

The two passed into the house, feeling relieved by the presence of the carriage, and delighted to find they had not committed the error of coming too soon. They were ushered into the family sitting-room where they found the minister's blind mother, her soft white hands folded patiently upon her lap, her placid face with its pathetic, sightless eyes turned in polite attention to an old lady of portly mien but defective hearing, who seemed to have fallen into the common error of believing every one else deafer than herself.

Inch by inch, impelled by that hungry curiosity which we may suppose likely to haunt a woman shut out from the usual sources of information, she had hitched her chair closer, still closer to the blind lady's, until their knees were in confiding juxtaposition.

A little apart, where she could catch the best light for her work, but near enough to be eyes for her mother and ears for the minister, Lucy sat daintily employed in varnishing a brilliant collection of autumn leaves.

Their respectful salutations offered to the two elderly ladies, a dumb

introduction gotten through with between themselves and the deaf lady, the triumvirate clustered eagerly about Lucy's work-table, inspired with a sudden and intense interest in dead foliage.

Paul had just delivered himself of a compliment so delicate yet so patent, involving a neat comparison between yellow-haired girls and sere and yellow leaves, as to fill the souls of his companions with the despairing conviction that there was no use entering the lists against a fellow who could manufacture compliments as fast as a patent machine could turn out shingles, when the deaf old lady threw herself into the breach and turned the tide of war.

"Leland? Did Lucy call him Leland?" she shrieked into poor Mrs. Samuels's unresisting ear. "I mean that young fellow with the short crisp curls, that holds his head up as if he weren't ashamed to look a body in the face. Beg pardon; forgot describing him would not help you much. The first one that shook hands with you."

"Weyland," said the blind lady, availing herself of the first opportunity to slip in the reply; "his father is Judge Weyland of Wickam."

"Wickam; Judge Wickam? Never heard of him; thought I knew every man, woman and child within fifty miles, too. Who was his mother?"

Then Lucy came to the rescue. Marching Paul straight up to the deaf lady, she stooped until her rosy lips rested upon the withered ear—a sight which caused three stalwart young men to wish they were withered ears—and in a voice louder than Paul believed the gentle creature could command, she announced:

"Mr. Paul Weyland, Mrs. Robinson, his father is Judge Weyland of Wickam."

"And his mother," said Paul, boldly coming to the relief of Lucy's pink cheeks, "was Miss Catherine Staunton, born and raised in this neighborhood."

Lucy looked grateful, and the old lady looked pleased, and Paul was feeling in quite a Jack Hornersish frame of mind, hoping his Christmas pie would come to him in the shape of a good long talk with Lucy, when a yellow shrivelled hand was laid violently upon the skirt of his coat.

"Sit down, sit down by me, I want to see you," shrieks deaf Mrs. Robinson

in a voice that would have made the fortune of a news-boy or pop-corn vendor. With a sadly crest-fallen countenance, Paul brings up a chair, repaying the glances of malicious triumph which the Franchman and Augustus sling at him *en passant*, with a comical look of rage and amusement. Performing a semi-circle with the silken robed knees, which in some occult fashion seemed to assist her hearing, until they bore directly upon her new victim, Mrs. Robinson spoke again:

"Staunton! eh! Staunton! I thought there was something familiar about your face. Why your mother's mother and I were like two sisters. Your mother was a beauty when she was a girl."

"I think her so yet," says Paul, proudly

"Got so fat? Louder, if you please, I am a little deaf in one ear."

"So I perceive, madam. You are much to be pitied."

"Small-pox pitted! dear me, dear me, and her skin was like satin."

(Paul, crescendo.) "You misunderstood me, madam; my mother is still considered the handsomest woman in all Wickam."

"Ah! now, that's right. You would learn to converse splendidly after a little while."

As Paul, in no way consoled by this flattering encomium upon his rapid improvement in yelling, lay back in his chair wiping from his forehead the clammy dew, superinduced by his violent and filial exertions to clear his mother from that small-pox imputation, the door opened to admit the minister, who had been made aware of their arrival by Mrs. Robinson's tumultuous discourse.

Paul hoped to find in him a deliverer. But he just shook hands with the two cousins, with a pleasant word for each, and then turned his attention to M. Girardeau.

"I am glad you have ridden over to-day, although Wednesday is the appointed day for most of the parties desiring your instruction to meet you here. But there is a lady in my study, the mother of two of your promised pupils, who has expressed a desire for a personal interview. Will you come with me?"

Of course he would. What else was there for him to do but to get up and follow the minister, leaving Augustus in full possession of the field.

Entering the adjoining room, he was introduced by the minister to his patroness, Mrs. Sheridan, bowing profoundly in recognition of his sense of the honor **done him** in the present interview, M. Emile retreated to the chair placed for him by the Rev. Mr. Samuels, with a refinement of malice, just where he could send his longing eyes straight into the **corner**, where Lucy sat, calmly and deftly handling her tiny varnish brush, while Augustus, the favorite of fortune, was staring at the pile of leaves on the table, suffering from the sickening consciousness that his stock of even passably sensible remarks was dwindling into the most shocking stupidity, leaving him bereft of all sense—the frantic desire to improve this shining hour.

"Augustus Ames, now or never!" thus encouragingly to himself.

"Quite a sudden change in the weather since yesterday," thus brilliantly to Miss Samuels.

"Yes; she always regretted these sudden changes on Mamma's account."

"Nothing venture, nothing win," valiantly for benefit of self: "He supposed so—yes, so sad," in imbecile response to Lucy.

Now Lucy Samuels was a sweet, brave girl, with a head full of sound common-sense, and a heart void of the slightest spice of coquetry.

Of the three young men who had been coming to the parsonage so frequently of late, she infinitely preferred Paul Weyland—merry, frank, intelligent—but this cousin of his, moody and melancholy, had appealed to her ready sympathy, and she always treated him with a sweet womanly cordiality that might readily enough be construed into encouragement by a lone-smitten wretch, reaching out eagerly for the slightest straw upon which to build his hopes.

Left to his own resources by the departure of Paul and Emile, his embarrassment increased with every effort he made to appear unembarrassed, seeing which, sweet Lucy Samuels felt sorry for him. Feeling which, brave Lucy Samuels, laying aside her autumn leaves and her varnish brush, said to him:

"Was it not Schubert's serenade you expressed yourself so anxious to hear once more?"

"It was."

"I think if you will come with me into the drawing-room, I can at last grati-

fy you. Your cousin sent it to me as soon as she returned to Wickam, and I am now ready to share in your enthusiasm."

Her face grew bright with the memory of the strains that had so thrilled her, her beautiful eyes invited him to follow her. Dizzy with the intoxicating sense of absolute encouragement, he rose up to follow her to the ends of the world, if she would only kindly lead him so far; and the two went deliberately out from before Paul's amazed vision, and M. Girardeau's wrathful gaze.

"And you see, Mr. Girardeau," the lady patroness was saying in that moment of anguish, "I never expected that my two sweet babes would ever have to struggle with a cold and unfeeling world. But, as dear Mr. Samuels so truly tells me, God works in most mysterious ways; and we never know what hard lot may be in store for us or ours. My beautiful darlings are half orphans, myself almost a pauper. It will be my girls' cruel lot to earn their livelihood by teaching others. This fact, you will please bear in mind, and make your instructions to them very thorough indeed. My dear Nannie is only seventeen, and her sweet sister Anne but two years older. Their poor father used to say they were both girls of remarkable intellect, but little did he then think they would ever be compelled to coin their intellects into filthy lucre."

This was neat, taking into consideration the fact that M. Girardeau himself occupied that painful position. Noting which, Mr. Samuels interpolated some flattering remark about the dignity and responsibility of the teacher's post. After which, it became absolutely necessary that M. Emile should respond in some fashion to one or both of them.

But what should he say? Of all that lengthy harangue, but one word had pierced the fog that veiled his senses. He was thinking of Lucy, and thinking of his own disappointment, and thinking of that lucky dog, Ames, and besides, people must talk English slowly, in order for him to comprehend them. He had learned much since he had been in this country, but not enough to keep up with such a comprehensive statement. The one word he did remember had astounded him:

"Babes! Madam, you say babes! What can I do wid your babies?"

Whereupon Mr. Samuels reduced the lady's flowing address to a concise statement in French, to which M. Girardeau lent his ears, but his soul was soaring aloft, on the delicious strains, which floated into them from the piano.

From Schubert's serenade to Schubert's personality; from Schubert's personality to the personality of other men; from a discussion of abstract, moral qualities to a discussion of those qualities in man most highly admired by Miss Samuels, Augustus found himself by a series of linguistic leaps, made easier by the absence of all save her and him, floundering in the dangerous waters of controversy.

But he did so want to know what manner of man might hope to win this starry creature. If he could only hear from her own lips what qualities she considered most excellent in man, he would model himself on her words. Did she demand bravery he would be brave as Julius Cæsar. Learning!—He would outstudy the veriest book-worm of them all. Piety!—If he must, like Jacob of old, wrestle with the heavenly powers for a blessing, he would become a saint.

How adorable she looked, sitting there on the piano-stool, one white hand toying softly and idly with the ivory keys, her sweet face turned slightly away from him. What earthly struggle too great to gain the heaven of such companionship?

"Tell me," he said, made bold by the quivering passion surging through every fibre in his body, "what lack in man is in your eyes the unpardonable sin?"

"Lack of moral strength," she answered promptly, her fingers running a race with each other through a chromatic scale.

He violently caught her hand from the keys, holding it in a fierce grip. "Hold! Don't toy with those keys so idly, and answer me so carelessly, when every question I have asked you has been freighted with a soul's burning desire to know what manner of man may hope to clasp this dear hand in wedlock."

"That man," said Lucy, withdrawing her hand and rising to her feet majestically, "alone, who is lord of himself at all times and under all circumstances," her large eyes rested gravely calmly upon his excited face. She was too gentle to say more; she wondered if she had enough. She felt thankful at that

trying moment to see Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Robinson standing on the threshold.

"Going, child? Going? Good-by!" the deaf visitor shrieked at her. So Lucy joined them hastily, and after that, Paul and M. Girardeau were making good the time they had been defrauded of, until they, too, must needs say good-by.

As they whirled out of sight, Paul cut as viciously at his pretty bays, as if he had his deaf persecutor herself under traces, and M. Girardeau lit a cigar and fell to smoking, moodily saying something unamiable between whiffs, about the "tam mudder of de sweet babes."

Augustus only was happy in his fool's paradise. She had played and sung to him, for him—alone. She had been gentle and pleasant and kind to him. She had sent him away in possession of the magic clue which was to guide him through the labyrinthine mazes of a woman's soul, until he enthroned himself within her heart. He must be strong; lord of himself, ere he could hope to be lord of this golden-haired queen.

Of all the pitiable objects poor humanity can furnish, it is a weak man with the ambition to be considered a strong one. Augustus Ames was fired with that ambition.

Will Love, mighty Love, potent for good as for evil; Love that can make or mar a man with one fiery breath; the lever to the noblest deeds, the wreckers of the brightest plans, the nurse of heroism, the murderer of souls, prove more potent to mould the malleable stuff of this poor mortal into a man of bone and sinew, than could a father's life-long watchfulness, a tender mother's tears of anguish, and years of patient prayer?

Perhaps!

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. WEYLAND TURNS MECHANIST.

"For still the world prevailed, and its dread laugh,
Which scarce the firm philosopher can scorn."

—Thompson.

It is both a curious and a profitable subject for observation, the devices resorted to by the world of fashionables for circumventing a contretemps which threatens to prove overwhelmingly embarrassing.

The dread inquiry, "What will people say?" like certain powerful nostrums, produces effects as various as man's varying nature.

The human sensitive plant, as the first cold breath of slander blows upon it, folds its leaves about it in shivering haste, and with low-bowed head awaits the world's awful sentence. Here is the timidity of soul, which results in mental paralysis at the agonizing thought of "being talked about," a resigned folding of the hands, a cowering of the heart, while, with every tortured nerve on tension, *vox populi* is awaited.

Its antithesis is found in him whose boldness does not always spring from the pure consciousness of rectitude. It is a sort of moral "squaring-off" at the world—a brazen defiance of its dictum, which is, after all, but a swashbuckler's cloak, thrown over a trembling, timorous soul.

The unco'-righteous will generally bring to bear upon the always-to-be-deplored occasion for "talk" a reserve of pious resignation to the will of God (impatiently fastening the responsibility of every bit of slanderous gossip on an august Being), gliding around the contretemps in voiceless humility, with a "His-will-be-done" expression of countenance.

A few brave pure souls there are, who rest calmly satisfied with the approval of their God and their consciences, leaving all contretemps to explain themselves.

Yet again the social arena can boast its genius who, fully equal to fate's most spiteful flings, can seize a threatened embarrassment with ambidexterous hands, and by one brilliant coup-de-main shape it into a reflector of éclat.

To this class of genius Mrs. Judge Weyland undoubtedly belonged.

If she could have yielded to the truest and most active instincts of her nature, she would have told Delphine's unwelcome mother that she was altogether inconvenient and superfluous, that she had shown great lack of consideration for the Staunton pride in recovering her mind, and crossing the seas just to torment them all by her existence; would have boxed her up, and nailed the box-top down with her own jewelled white hands, and have re-shipped her to M. Brousseau or the keeper of the lunatic asylum, without even the precautionary label of "This side up with care."

This plan being, however, not totally consistent with the requirements of civilized life, she abandoned it for a more feasible one, mounted her favorite hobby (which was, that you could convince

any one that the stars are made of tin-foil, if you would only work on them politely, persistently and politically), and rode it straight at the contretemps which threatened to set every Wickam tongue wagging, clearing it in true jockey style.

Early in the morning of the day succeeding the one which had witnessed Mrs. Staunton's acknowledgement and acceptance into the family, the Judge's lady left home in her carriage, leaving mother and daughter to cultivate a better knowledge of each other, in a whole morning's tête-à-tête, telling them not to look for her home to luncheon, she should probably be gone until three or four o'clock.

"To the Parsonage," was her first order, as she settled herself upon the cushions of her carriage, with a gentle silken rustle.

"My dear Catharine, what will we do? This miserable affair—so good of you to ride around. Poor Susie, how people will talk. She feels it so keenly—for weeks to come. What does Delphine say. There is something so disreputable about it all. Do you not think so, and the Judge too—" Mrs. Ames grew incoherent from excess of misery.

"As you say, Maria," said the Judge's lady, breezily. "People will talk—must talk, in fact. The only thing to do is to direct the stream of tattle, so it shall fertilize, instead of submerging our family tree."

Maria humbly confessed her inability to follow her more brilliant sister in this lofty flight of fancy.

"Why, I mean that I propose people shall talk this disagreeable family affair of ours into the most charmingly-romantic sensation of the day."

"You propose! Why, Catharine dear, you talk as if you could actually make people think to suit you!"

"And so I can."

"My dear sister, are you not presumptuously assuming a Divine attribute?"

"Omnipotence? No, not just exactly that; but, you dear old dormouse, do you not know there is nothing in the world easier than to twist each individual opinion into an individual thread of a screw, until you have twisted public opinion, on the principle of an Archimedean screw, to the desired level? All the art consists in working up your threads while your material is in me!"

able condition, which accounts for my surprising activity this morning."

"Catharine, you are a wonderful woman," says the feeble sister, admiringly.

"Thanks! Well, Mrs. Simpson is to receive my first twist. I am going to return her almost-forgotten visit, this morning. And in the course of conversation, I shall tell her of the delightful addition to our little family circle of late—"

"Oh, dear Catharine, will that be quite true?" interrupts the minister's wife, who is afflicted with a conscience.

"Quite true," mocks the Judge's wife, who is not afflicted in that way. "No, not at all true. But I am not going on a crusade in the name of truth. And to be strictly truthful, one must prepare to run a muck at all creation, or get her 'to a nunnery!'"

"Go on," says Truth's champion, striking her colors.

"Well, where was I? Oh! then I will tell her the sad story of William's wife, who lost her mind when her father was murdered; and after getting her sympathy and interest excited to the highest notch, I will tell her that I shall certainly look for her soon, to call on the still handsome heroine of the story. I guarantee I will leave her quivering with impatience over the delay which etiquette demands before she returns my call."

"Then, who?"—with breathless interest.

"Then on to Mrs. Dr. Rogers, who you know is always the first to sniff a scandal afar off, and to say 'Ha! ha!' over it."

"Do not let us be uncharitable, Catharine dear, especially just now, when we are in so much need of charity ourselves."

"I know I will find her rolling this sweet morsel ecstatically under her tongue preparatory to its propagation all beslimed with her own venomous additions. And she is going to receive me with her *noli me tangere* look, as if she dreaded contamination from my new kid gloves—pretty are they not? Three buttons, and such a perfect shade of mauve."

"Lovely! How I wish my poor Susie could afford such."

"Well, of her—Mrs. Rogers, not poor Susie. I must form several threads to my screw. She is rather an unmanageable subject at best, and to convert her

anticipated tit-bit of scandal into an occasion for congratulation will require considerable skill and patience. I shall not dare leave her, before she has committed herself to one or two decided "how delightfuls," or "charmingly romanticals!"

"My poor horses must pay the penalty for it all, but the Staunton name must not be left to be smirched by every miserable news-monger."

"But suppose you fail?"—anxiously.

"Fail!"—scornfully. "Rest assured that my house, so long as William's wife remains there, will be the most attractive house in all Wickam, and Celestine herself be the rose that all are praising. Now, good-by. You and Susie go round this morning; never mind my absence. Archimedes must to work. I have my hands perfectly full with this French nuisance. I must stop at my dressmaker's and send her up to the house to redress the woman, who, in my estimation, is much more in need of redressing than her wrongs."

The result of Mrs. Weyland's masterly activity established her title to be considered a genius, beyond peradventure."

The gravel upon the Judge's well-kept carriage drive was ground into powder by the incessant crouching of wheels and pawing of horses. The butler seriously meditated demanding an increase of wages, as compensation for the arduousness of his task as door-opener. Mrs. Staunton was the rage, the fashion. It was so delightfully romantic, you know! And what a tender melancholy still brooded in her glorious eyes! Delphine, who had pronounced herself the most-to-be-pitied of all existing beings, found herself suddenly being congratulated on all sides, instead of condoled with—until she actually began to look upon herself as a monster of unfilial harshness. She felt grateful to people for their good opinion, and wondered why she could not see the charms and excellences so patent to the world. She was blinded, she expected, by reason of the bitter loss this gain had entailed upon her. She hoped she would come after awhile to do this much-wronged mother justice. Innocent child, she predicated her mother's excellence upon the idea that people's good opinion of people must be based upon some merit in people.

Max alone remained cold and courte-

ous and distant. He had called more than once with his sister, had treated Mrs. Staunton with frigid deference; had talked to herself kindly and gravely, but had never once added an insincere tribute to the complimentary tide setting so suddenly toward the shabby-genteel stranger.

"Mother, will you not appoint a day for our home-going. I am tired of Wickam. I want to feel at home somewhere."

Delphine asked this of her mother, as they two had retired to their bed-room, after an exhausting day of receiving and returning calls.

Mrs. Staunton was unbraiding her long black braids in front of a cheval glass, which generously displayed to her gratified vision her form, wonderfully improved by Mrs. Judge's dressmaker; her train gracefully sweeping the carpet, and her whole self younger and handsomer by many years.

The white, severe face of the daughter, sitting listlessly on a sofa far removed from any glass, and the girlish smirk of satisfaction upon the maturer face of the mother, was in strange contrast.

"Tired of Wickam! You strange darling. Why, this existence is heavenly. Our room is superb, our fare perfect, our uncle and aunt charmingly kind to us, our good friends of good Wickam so cordial and full of pretty sayings—not a care, not a responsibility. Ah, heavenly! And yet, you queer angel, you long to go down to your musty old country-house; to your pigs, your cows, your fat old Sergeant. Where did we get all our domestic tastes from? Not from papa, cherished William; he was a gay cavalier. Nor from mamma; for, ah, my sweet one, I do adore luxury, I revel in this glorious idleness."

Madame leaves her glass reluctantly, and throwing herself gracefully down by the daughter, who is evidently criticizing her unamiably, her arms encircle the girlish waist coaxingly.

"So my sweet child pines for the rural districts?"

"We cannot live on Uncle and Aunt Weyland; and my musty old house is at least my own, and in that consists its superior attraction to this elegant abode."

"You say truly," sighs Madame; "we cannot live on Uncle and Aunt Weyland, kind and charming as they are. It is wrong for me to pine for luxuries that

can never be mine again. I say again, dear child, for mamma was lapped in luxury and cradled in ease until—ah, until—do not let us speak of it. I will go with you to your, to our home, whenever you wish. Now come kiss me; this has been a triumphant day, but mamma feels slightly wearied."

"Thank you; we will go down to the place, then, on Friday."

On the morning of that day, quite early, so early that she knew there would be no one astir in the dear old home but Miss Morgan, she stole quietly away from the side of her sleeping mother, and went to perform that saddest of all tasks, taking leave of those dearest to her of all the world.

She made her own way into the library where Eleanor always spent the freshest hours of her day in reading. Impulsively throwing her arms about the woman who had been so much more to her than this new mother could ever be, burying her head in the bosom that had been the receptacle of all her childish woes, Delphine yielded to a burst of unavailing but irrepressible sorrow.

"Noneel! Noneel! how can I give you and Evy and Max up forever and ever—and this precious home; no other place will ever be like home to me! Oh, it is too hard. I did not want a mother. I was happy without her! Oh, I know I am wicked, but I am so unhappy I cannot help being wicked."

Eleanor raised the wet face from her shoulder, and tenderly smoothing back the girl's rumpled hair, she spoke brave words of wise counsel to her:

"Child, this is sad for both of us; sadder, I expect, for me than it is for you, for you are young. For you there will spring into existence other hopes and other plans than those associated with Evy, Max and me. Gradually they will overlay the happy years we have spent together, until all connected with us and this home you now think so precious, will be but a pleasant memory. It is right and well that this should be so, else life would be one long wail for severed ties, for shattered hopes. But you are taking away from this house a light not likely to be shed upon our sober household from any other source. You are very very dear to us, Delphine, so dear, that for awhile our days will be too long, and our hours will seem drearily empty. But in this matter there is no que—"

of your preferences or our regrets. It is a matter of duty, so clear so sharp and well-defined, that there is no room for vacillation, and repining will but rob us both of the strength to perform that duty bravely and cheerfully."

"But how can I help repining; a little you know, just a little, when I am called on without a moment's warning to leave all that I love; to go away from this dear, dear home; with a mother—but no, I will not say one word about her. It is cowardly and mean. A shadow of blame does not attach to her. Nor is it her fault that I cannot just yet accord her anything more than cold duty.

"Well-spoken," said a deep voice, just behind her chair; "and as for repining, you can help that, for you must feel it's worse than uselessness; you will help it when I tell you that it will make Eleanor and myself very unhappy."

The "child" just quietly slipped one hand back over the top of the chair, without turning her face toward Max. He held it for a little while in a warm, firm clasp, then said briskly:

"As for the home you love so well, I have potted a goodly proportion of it out, for you to take with you. Come with me."

Following him into the garden he led her up to a goodly array of boxes and pots, in which she recognized a host of her floral pets, fresh and vigorous for the journey ahead of them.

A pair of shining eyes are turned towards Max, and a grateful little hand nestles once more within his own:

"Dear Max, and I went away from you so angrily that day."

"Yes. You did wrong there. You should have trusted me in spite of your own ears. But that is all forgotten. Promise me never to doubt me again. That is all I ask in compensation for the sharp pain you inflicted then."

"Never," says Delphine, solemnly.

"And you will remember your promise to call on me, if you need a true and disinterested friend; and you will let me have a voice in any momentous decision you may be called on to make?"

"I will remember."

They wandered for more than an hour about the garden where he and she, the dignified lawyer and the light-hearted — had spent so many moments of pure

unalloyed happiness, Max talking a great deal more than was his wont; now giving dry practical floricultural directions for the treatment of the plants he had potted for her, now mapping out a course of reading for her, now impressing on her the advantage of bringing a brave, cheerful spirit to bear upon every inevitable ill in life, but never a word about himself or the keen pain her going caused him. Maybe he thought that any such word would form but a poor illustration of that brave, cheerful spirit of endurance he was recommending.

So the "little lady" went down to the old place to live.

It was not at all like the home-coming that Sergeant Danbury had so loved to picture to himself, when the little lady, a starry-eyed bride, was to descend from her grand carriage, leaning on the arm of a grand gentleman, her husband (and how grand he must be, to be worthy to be called her husband, Sergeant Danbury could hardly determine), and enter into her own, and then on the next day the grand gentleman was to receive the reward for his disinterested affection, by hearing of her unsuspected fortune. This, however, with various alterations and amendments and additions, had formed the old soldier's mental pabulum for so long, that now, with this sudden change in the programme, he was like some great ruminating animal, suddenly deprived of its cud.

But he could have cheerfully foregone his long-cherished romance if only the little lady would not go about it so white-faced and gentle and dignified, that it made his tender heart ache. If she would only fly out into one of the old-time "tantrums," when it did seem as if the combined powers of heaven and earth failed to please her, he could find it in him to thank her heartily.

If full measure pressed down and running over of gentle deference, respectful duty and filial submissiveness could satisfy the heart of a mother, coming from across the seas with that heart empty and yearning to be filled with the tender love of which she had been so long defrauded, Mrs. Staunton should have been over-well pleased with the perfect comportment of her new-found daughter.

"As mother wishes it" was the new

formula of Delphine's altered life. She was conscious that in her rebellious heart there still lurked a feeling of bitter resentment against this woman, who had interposed the powerful claims of nature against the truer claims of affection and gratitude, tearing her ruthlessly away from her soul's kindred. She was so conscious that in her was none of a daughter's proper affection, that she made up the deficiency in excess of frozen, dutiful deference, which was accepted with an airy philosophy on Madame's side, partly due to her nationality, and partially to a certain shallowness of nature which made it easier for her to acquiesce than to direct.

It was only when the girl hovered lovingly about the flowery mementoes of her old home that her face grew bright, and her eyes took on that deep, soulful look which transported her from the realms of a dull, leaden-houred present, into a past redolent of peaceful days and tenderest affections.

About every shrub, every floweret, every evergreen, there clustered some sweet memory of words spoken, of ideas advanced or lofty thoughts engendered with a seeming lack of purpose, when she and Max had been tending the infancy of these now glorious flowers. Memories, which in spite of Nonee's prophecy that the day would come when new hopes and new plans would overlay that blessed time, must forever represent the freshest, truest, warmest feelings of which her nature was capable.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CRISIS IN THE AMES FAMILY.

"The words that a father speaks to his children in the privacy of home are not heard by the world, but, as in whispering galleries, they are clearly heard at the end and by posterity."—*Jean Paul Richter*.

A last visit from the Lodge to the Parsonage; a visit on which M. Emile Girardeau was transferred into the hands of the Rev. Mr. Samuels, by him to be transferred into the hands of the reduced widow, who had promised to board and lodge him for a modest consideration. A visit, during which Augustus chose to manufacture fresh food for hope, because Lucy, fearing she had been harsh with the sad-faced sensitive cousin of Paul's, had been even sweeter and more cordial than usual, allowing her hand to rest confidently in his while

she gave expression to some gentle regret about his departure. A visit, during which Paul manœuvred himself into a *l'ête-à-l'ête* with Miss Samuels, which left that young lady very pink about the cheeks, and himself as proud of visage as a young conqueror. Then good-bye and departure.

Lights in the Staunton house windows surprised and attracted them, for Delphine was certainly in Wickam and the Sergeant and his mother only occupied a wing. They turned aside to solve the mystery.

Delphine received them; then they must hear the wonderful romance and kiss the new aunt, adding their voices to the congratulatory ones poor Della so resented.

Before they leave, Paul finds an opportunity to whisper a great secret in his cousin's ears. He does it while Augustus is talking to the new aunt.

Delphine's two hands are clasped eagerly together in token of glad approval:

"Oh, I am so happy!" she says, mysteriously; then the cousins say good-bye, and the next day sees them en route for their long neglected homes.

Mrs. St. John Ames seated herself behind the breakfast-cups and saucers on the morning after her son's return, with a very red face, smoked eyes and shining finger-tips, also with a general suggestion of the kitchen stove about her fresh morning dress.

Augustus had come home too late the evening before to receive anything more than a chilling salutation from his father, and an ominous intimation that he should have something to say to him the next morning after breakfast. An intimation which had made the mother's heart quake, though strange to say, the son had said, "Yes, sir, whenever you please," with an alacrity that looked wonderfully like satisfaction.

Poor Mrs. Ames, she knew so well what an ordeal was in store for a victim to whom Mr. Ames had "something to say," and her boy had come home from his holiday looking so happy and handsome and bright (for him), that she dreaded for him the something to say, which was to wipe out all this new brightness and bring back that dogged look of sullen endurance which had caused her many a briny tear.

So, in the morning of the fast-

threatened "say," the mother was up particularly early, revising and improving the morning's meal.

Flour puffs were substituted for corn-meal cakes, for Mr. Ames liked puffs particularly well, but they were too expensive to have often. The coffee she made herself, so it should lack neither strength nor clearness. The breakfast bacon too, she broiled in the coals with her own careful hands, getting a flame-colored visage and smoked eyes and grimy fingers over it, which, however, were but trifles light as air weighed against the importance of having the plain material at her command faultlessly prepared on a day so fraught with solemn import.

The minister's wife did not pretend to any theoretical knowledge of physiology—she was only acting from personal and very decided experience of some occult connection between gastronomy and psychology.

In fact, many a time when this gentle woman had sat in the Rector's pew on a Sunday, wincing under a spiritual pelt-ing which she was receiving along with the rest of the poor miserable sinners gathered together there to hear the Gospel of love, she had remembered with a pang of remorse that Mr. Ames's eggs had been boiled one minute too long that morning, and he had complained of the coffee. The cook had done what she ought not to have done (to the eggs) and left undone what she ought to have done (to the coffee), and there was no health in anybody.

But on this occasion nothing should be left undone to send the Rev. St. John into his library in as placid a frame of mind as could be ensured by a placidly content stomach.

The Rev. Mr. Ames would have scorned the imputation that he was coaxable in any way, manner or degree, most angrily, which would have been a *de facto* denial that he was a man. For, from the days when Adam ate that notorious apple and Samson laid his curly head lazily in Delilah's lap, down to the more recent morning which found Mrs. Ames smoking her eyes and singeing her fingers, by way of coaxing her husband through his digestive organs to deal leniently by her boy, one monotonous succession of men—susceptible, some through their hearts, some through their heads—yet others, through some grosser

channels, has gone plodding through the ages.

All the art consists in finding the vulnerable point. Once master of that, and you may throw your darts with triumphant success that Paris of Trojan memory achieved.

But *revenons à nos moutons*:

The father who had something to say, and the son who had something to hear, repaired to the minister's study as soon as breakfast was over.

Indicating his desire that his son should be seated by silently pushing a chair towards him, the Rev. St. John planted himself on the hearth-rug, strengthening his position by grasping both lappels of his faded dressing gown fiercely, and asked with peremptory abruptness:

"Do you know how old you are, Augustus?"

The question was propounded in such a catechetical manner, and sounded so very much as if it might be a companion question to—"Who gave you this name?"—that Augustus was viciously inclined to reply irrelevantly: "My sponsors in baptism, sir;" but he curbed the mischievous inclination, giving a reply prompt enough and exact enough to have been entered into the census-taker's book:

"Twenty-two years old, sir, on the fourteenth day of last August."

"And how have you spent those twenty-two precious years, Augustus?" solemnly.

"Variously, sir. The first decade in sleeping, squalling, colicking, teething, doing up the measles and other infantile inevitables; in learning how to walk, how to talk, how to say my A, B, C's, and how to get flogged for not learning them faster, and in other cheerful pursuits. The second decade, poorly enough, I am afraid. In learning a little of good but more of evil—in idleness, in repining, and in utter good-for-nothingness, father."

"An answer conceived in flippancy, terminating in a just acknowledgment. This state of affairs cannot continue much longer, Augustus."

"No longer, sir. I have come home fully determined to enter upon a new course of action. I have been a dullard and a sluggard, and am heartily ashamed of my past record. It is my most earnest desire to prove to you and to all I

love (here "Lucy Samuels," floated in golden capitals before his mental vision) that there is some good stuff in me."

"My satisfaction at hearing you express such sentiments is extreme. See to it, boy, that your words do not prove a mere frothy ebullition of momentary compunction for your recent undutiful conduct."

"Trust me, father! I think my good resolutions will carry me farther on the road towards achievement, if I am sustained by the comforting thought that somebody believes in me and trusts me, than they are likely to do if I start out battling against obstacles from without, doubts from within."

"Prove yourself worthy of my confidence before demanding it as your right. I shall be no niggard of it when you have fairly earned it. He is a poor paymaster who pays in advance."

Augustus drooped his head despondently. His love for Lucy Samuels had given rise to a fictitious sort of bravery which was not yet so firmly rooted as to bear all resistance unscathed. He loved her and was determined to win her. "Strength" was the watchword she had given him to carry with him into the bivouac of life. He needed strength right here, when determined to brave the iron will of his father more than he ever could elsewhere. If his father would only be kinder, and not make the home yoke so heavy to borne! But he must not fall back into the old groove of bitter repining. He thought of Lucy's sweet tender eyes, of the white soft hand he had held in his such a daring long time, and grew brave once more:

"Father have you formed any decided wishes on the subject of my further career?"

"I have, a very decided one."

"Well, sir."

"I desire that you shall be ready to start for the theological college under charge of the Right Rev. William Haywood, one week from today."

"Study for the ministry, father!"

"For the ministry."

"You wish me to go into the pulpit?"

"Into the pulpit. Nor is there any reason why you should repeat my words, with as much horror as if I had ordered you into the fiery furnace."

His son did not answer. He was girding his loins for the battle. He was

struggling to be lord of himself, lord of his words, lord of his destiny.

The minister was silent too, letting his keen eyes wander from the face of his first-born, to a corner of the ceiling, where they fastened upon a big black spider who was performing his duty in that sphere of life in which it had pleased God to place him, by carefully tightening the coil which an unfortunate fly struggled bravely to escape from. The clerical mind was far away in a hazy speculation upon the wonders of creation—the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Great Being who had so ordered the going of that fly as to lead him straight into the meshes woven by that industrious spider, when his son's voice brought him back to the lecturer's stand.

"Father!"

"Well?"

"I cannot do as you want me."

"Cannot!"

"Will not, then."

"You forget to whom you address your rebellious remarks."

"No, sir, I remember that I address them to a father who has been very patient with me, an idle dog, even though he has been very stern. A father to whom I owe much as a son; a father to whom I would say, as a man: Do not make the yoke of filial obedience too heavy to be borne."

Mr. Ames gazed at his son as he might at some altogether unfamiliar manner of man. There was a look about the boy's face which was unfamiliar. Not defiance, not disrespect: simply, calm, cool determination.

"This is the legitimate result of your association with the loosely-raised son of a free-thinker!"

"Paul, you mean! The bravest, manliest, most generous-hearted fellow that walks! Think what you please of me, father, but do not fasten on him the responsibility of what you are pleased to call my rebellion. I am a braver, bolder and stronger man than I was when I started on that visit; but Paul Weyland is not the sorcerer who has worked out my worldly salvation for me—" He checked himself. Not into that stony heart could he pour the story of the wondrous, sweet magician, who had held to his lips the wine of life, saying: "Drink and be strong."

He came suddenly back to the subject of the interview: "I have done a good

deal of thinking for myself, father, since I left home, and I have made up my mind."

"Indeed! and with what result?"

"I wish to enter upon an active business career. I want to shake off the sloth that has almost benumbed my faculties. I want to take my place among the real earnest workers of the world. I have been such a poor apology for a man, father, that I can hardly dare hold up my head and say I will do this thing; but I can say I want to do this thing, and I will try."

"Is this conglomerate of vague desires and vaguer resolutions all you can bring to bear against my well-defined wishes?"

"For a little while, yes, father. I ask you to be patient yet a little longer, and I will have something more decided to say as soon as I can look about me."

"You ask much, boy, in asking a further extension of patience. I have been over patient in listening to your childish twaddle. My own wishes remain unaltered."

"Father, do you think that I am a fit subject for God's awful ministry?"

"There are none fit; no, not one. The heart of every man, from the haughtiest bishop down to the skulking house-breaker, is full of wickedness and corruption. By prayer and fasting alone, may you hope to become half worthy, but with the solemn responsibility you take upon yourself as a priest of God, there will come to you an earnestness of desire to render yourself fitter for the post, which will prove with God's help, your salvation."

"Am I mistaken in thinking that in the Ordering of Priests a question is asked: 'Do you think in your heart that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?'"

"You are not mistaken."

"And the answer is: 'I think it.'"

"You are right again."

"And furthermore, in that same Ordering: 'He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. Father, if I enter the ministry it will not be by the door of fitness, but through the window of expediency, thereby proclaiming myself a thief and a robber.'"

"I have parleyed longer now than my better judgment approves. Two weeks longer I will wait for you to decide

whether you will prepare to enter a theological seminary, as I desire, or whether, at the expiration of those same two weeks, you will take upon yourself the entire and unaided responsibility of your own future career and support."

"You need not wait those two weeks, father. I can give you my decision now. I will not,—"

"Hold, boy! White and stern and wrathful the minister stood before his son, one warning finger upheld, his grey hairs trembling with the nervous strain that shook the stern old man like some storm-strained oak: "Rash scatter-brain, if you have never known what it was to think before, go learn your lesson soon. If you have never known what it was to ponder well, go learn to do it now, for I tell you, boy, there is dire need for it here, such need, as may the God, you refuse to serve, in pity grant you may never know again. Go. I will not take your answer now."

Augustus had risen to his feet and stood facing his father, no less white, no less rigid, no less tremulous than the old man whom he was braving for the first time in a long life of almost child-like submission. His face was very sad but also very determined:

"Have you anything more for me to hear, father?"

"Nothing, but this warning. Heaven's curse upon disobedience is as strong, as fresh, as inevitable now, as it was when Eden was lost by man's weakness and woman's folly."

Then St. John Ames turned him abruptly away from his son; flung himself down to his desk, and seizing his pen, hurled himself into his next Sunday's sermon.

And Augustus Ames passing out from his father's presence with a slow, weary step, and face full of worry met his mother, who drew him down to her lower physical altitude to give him a comforting kiss.

"Well, my son?"

"It is not well, mother. Father is full of wrath against me. But I cannot, will not, enter the ministry."

Too loyal a wife to sustain a son in rebellion, too firmly of the boy's own thinking to chide him, Mrs. Ames just softly patted the hand which lay in hers, in a pitying fashion.

But Augustus knew he had an ally, and took heart of grace.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NEW AUGUSTUS.

"Only some few in later as in early life affect the formation of our character; the multitude passes by like a distant army. One friend, one teacher, one beloved, one club, one dining-table, one work-table, one house, influence the individual, while the rest of the crowd passes him without leaving a trace behind."—*Richter*.

Still caressing her boy's hand in wordless sympathy Mrs. Ames led him toward her bed-room door, and pushing him in, she said a little hurriedly:

"Wait here, dear, and you and I will have a pleasant little chat presently. You ~~must have~~ so much to tell me about your long visit to the country."

"Not here, mother! Not to bring down father's wrath on your dear head. He will chide you for aiding and abetting his son in rebellion."

"Soul son! do not speak harshly; do not ever allow yourself to think harshly of your father. Remember how much he has to try him; remember how much he had set his heart upon this thing; remember how he had loved to look forward to the time when he, old and feeble, would have a son's assistance in his parochial duties; think of his disappointment—and of nothing else."

She waited for no reply. But left him to ponder as he had never pondered before, while she, gentle peacemaker, went about the task which was to strengthen her title to be called a child of God.

She found her husband with contracted brow and low-bent head writing furiously. He had a stupendous task before him. Though one arose from the dead, he did not believe this wicked and perverse generation could be turned from the worship of the idol of the hour, science, the enemy of revealed religion; but he longed to hurl one mighty and convincing argument at this idol of clay, which should shatter it into pieces before the eyes of its idolators, and bare the crumbling clay of which it was made to their blinded eyes.

Commencing after the fashion of his learned ilk, away, away from any imaginable interest to his hearers, he was placing the dread battalion of "begats" in battle array, when a timid "Mr. Ames" sounded close behind him, and a hand, soft, if it was work-reddened, fell gently on his shoulder.

"Well, Maria?"

"Husband, you will not be angry with our dear boy, will you, because he does not incline to your wishes in this matter?" Remember how easy it is to start a young man at his time of life and with his temperament, upon the road to ruin. Oh, St. John, for the sake of our son, for the sake of your own future peace of mind, be gentle in this crisis; for a crisis. I feel it to be—"

"Mrs Ames!" Medusa's eyes looked at the daring little woman from under her husband's shock of grey hair, and if she had been anything less than a mother-pleading the cause of a son, she must have turned to stone there before him. "You will oblige me in future by confining yourself to the temporal cares of this household; its spiritual welfare is my own peculiar charge. You will please close the door when you retire."

Mrs. Ames retired and she closed the door when she did so. There was space enough between the study door and her own room-door for big tears to well up in her eyes; but there was, too, time enough for her to give her face one vigorous sweep with her handkerchief, so as to send her into her boy's presence with a face as gently cheerful as if her mission had proven a grand success.

With careful economy she replenished the coal fire, drew towards her the basket of mending, which, like Penelope's web "was never ending, still beginning," and said cheerily: "Now you can talk and I can listen. I can always listen so much better when my fingers are in motion."

"Mother, I have a great secret to tell you."

"A secret, my son!" There was more of apprehension than interest in the mother's voice.

"Yes, I have found a cure for the old weakness, mother. An object in life, mother, and a talisman against bitterness, gloom and despondency!"

"And that is—?"

"The love of a good, sweet girl—a girl nearer akin to the angels than to groveling humanity, I have never felt like yielding to the old temptation since I have had the dread of unfitting myself for her presence, to deter me: I have never looked upon myself as a cumberer of the earth, since I have set myself the task of winning her: I have never felt the old bitter desire to curse God and die that used sometimes to sweep over—"

me in an irresistible flood of misery. Oh, mother, the bare hope of winning her for my wife has put such new life, such vaulting ambition, such buoyant hope into me, that I hardly know myself. I have had the duty of thankfulness to God flung at my head from the cradle up to manhood. I have been told that I ought to thank God for my manifold blessings, when I could discover no blessings. But now, mother, my heart is full of thankfulness. I thank Him for creating her; I thank Him for the ineffable sweetness he has dowered her with; I thank Him for my own being; for the health which will aid me in laboring for her; for the world's untold treasures, which I may struggle to obtain for her sweet sake. She is my religion, mother; and my religion is Love!"

"My son! my son! A wife!"

"There, now, you are frightened, and you see visions of your scatter-brain son, as father is so fond of calling me, falling in love with a pretty face and bringing a daughter of Heth into the godly atmosphere of this house to be a burden on father's cold charity, a thorn in your dear side."

"No, no, dear, not quite that"—the pale cheeks flushed consciously—"but you are so young, and you have no business habits yet, and you cannot know the young lady very well yet, and—"

"Don't multiply 'ands' on me, mother. Let me tell you who the lady is, and I will promise not to gush any more. The girl I love is Miss Lucy Samuels, sister to the Rev. Harris Samuels I have heard you speak of, as being one of the few 'truly called.'"

"My dear boy!" There was a whole volume of approval in that simple exclamation.

"Yes. And, mother, she comes as near perfection as a creature born in 'original sin,' as I suppose father would say she was, can come."

"Yes, dear, I believe that is the way all young men think and talk the first time they fall in love."

"The first time! Why, do you suppose a second time is possible with me?"

The wise little woman went straight on:

"But I feel satisfied that Miss Samuels' home influence must have been of an order calculated to make her a most desirable wife for any young man."

"Desirable!" Mother, I never knew you to use such insipid language."

"But I am not in love, my son. You do not expect me to gush, too."

"No, to be sure. I just want you to listen. Why, mother, I've grown strong and brave and resolute, just through loving that girl. She seems to have roused all the man in me. I look back on my old opium-chewing, vision-seeing existence with horror, and towards her as towards the angel who has grasped my hand just as I was about to fall into a bottomless pit, and led me back by flowery paths into the straight and narrow road of safety. To win that girl a man must have the patience and pluck of old Jacob. But by that patriarch's beard I will win her."

"And is it all settled?"

"No."

"Nothing definite?"

"Not very. This is the way of it all. She knows that I love her, and she gave me to understand that when a man had proven himself a man, or, as she put it, was 'lord of himself at all times and under all circumstances,' he might talk to some effect. I am making a late start, mother; and I will flag often, I fear; and sometimes the old curse will tempt me sorely. I am weak in well-doing, mother. I will want some one to hold up my hands, as it were. Some one to cheer me on by saying, 'I believe in you.' Somebody's love to keep my soul from growing faint. The world is a broad field, and laborers of all sorts are in demand. Father need never fear a single pulpit being empty because I shall never fill one. But I want work, mother. Actual life work, no dreaming study, no arm-chair labor. I am afraid of myself. I want to get away from the musty smell of holy books, from the droning sound of orthodox sermons. Fresh air is what I want and is what I cannot get within this mouldering old parsonage. I want to get out into the breezy, busy world, where every man's motto is: 'fair play but no favor.'"

He looked so thoroughly aroused, so bravely in earnest that his mother gazed at him wonderingly. A jealous pang shot through the heart which had yearned so over this boy's dreaming boyhood, had expended such a wealth of patient prayer to bring about the wondrous miracle of his transfiguration, while her girl rival had wrought it by the glance of a bright eye; the magic of a few careless words. But she would not stand up-

on the manner of his saving—just so he be saved.

"And now," resumes Augustus, catching his breath quickly as if taken a little aback at his own daring; "I shall expend the two weeks which father persists in waiting for my answer in looking for this real life-work that I say I want. I will get it close at hand, mother, if I can, for bad as I am, I believe it would cost you a pang to have me go far from you. Then I can come to you for strength. You will let me talk to you about Lucy, and you will help me to keep hope and courage, and resolution alive."

Mustering all the enthusiasm possible over a young lady whose name was only an hour old in her experience, Mrs. Ames said all manner of encouraging things to her son, with a half-guilty feeling that this was not just what her stern husband would approve.

Father and son meet again at the dinner table, but there is no allusion made to the subject of that morning's interview. The meal disposed of in unsocial silence, Mr. Ames retires once more to his study, Susie and her mother to the family sitting-room, and Augustus, with a face into which a new business air is fast creeping, takes his hat and goes down town.

Down town on that occasion resolves itself into Judge Weyland's comfortable library, where, as he expected, he found the Judge and Paul; and where, as he did not expect, he found Mr. Timothy Lonsdale, the well-to-do president of Wickam's only bank.

The Weyland mansion was one of those houses into which a person may always enter in confident expectation of finding folks in a good humor, and of spending a pleasant half hour.

The thread of discourse was snapped abruptly in two by Augustus's entrance, to be resumed only after the merry Judge had made his nephew welcome, asked after his frame of mind since the lecture he felt sure he had been subjected to, informing him that nothing less than imprisonment for two weeks upon bread and water was to be Paul's sentence; then back to his visitor, leaving Augustus to turn interrogator: "Well, have you carried out your resolution to go to work as soon as you returned to Wickam?" he asks of Paul.

"I have. Father has consented to let me read law in his office, and I go to work tomorrow."

"To work!" with a touch of the old bitterness. "As usual, Paul, you have got the cream, and I the blue-john. But I wish you all manner of pleasantness, old fellow, in the hard career before you."

"Don't sneer, Gus. If you think it is to be all play, because I am to read under father, you make a huge mistake. The old gentleman is a perfect martinet when it comes to business. I expect to occupy under him, for the first year, the dignified and exalted position of office-boy, with privilege to read his books when there are no errands to be run, with clothes and victuals for remuneration; to be gradually promoted to copying clerk, and so up, round by round until, as he tells me, I will be privileged to climb as near the top round, as industry and mediocre ability will carry me. Now for your good resolutions."

"I have had a rousing interview with father, resulting in a positive refusal on my part to comply with his wish that I should enter the ministry, and a positive refusal on his part to have anything to do with me if I do not."

"The deuce! That rather complicates things."

"Yes. But—" Augustus stopped and listened.

"The trouble is, sir, to get hold of a young man, nowadays, who knows the meaning of the word 'work!' Our boys have been reared all wrong, Sir, all wrong. One comes to you, wanting you to accept him on the strength of his good old family name—as if I care who the deuce my clerks' great-grandfathers were. So the great-grandsons are not worth a copper. Another comes with good recommendations, can do this thing, that thing, the other thing, in the most irreproachable manner, if—you can only keep him sober long enough to do any one thing. Another regards all manner of work and all necessity for work as a cursed degradation, and bestows just so much time and thought upon his duties, as are left over from the real business of his life, which is cursing fate for not sending him into the world with the gold spoon in his mouth, that he thinks his transcendent merit entitles him to. But they are quick enough to howl over the facility with which skilled labor from abroad can find employment.

"Patience, Mr. Lonsdale, patience. Bear in mind that the present generation

of our boy's (reversing the order of entomology), answer to the chrysalides of the butterflies of the past, from which shall emerge the grub-worm of the future."

"Maybe so, sir, maybe so, but God help the country while we are all webbed up, waiting for the grub-worms."

"Deuce take it, Lonsdale! you're as much of a pessimist as the longest-faced preacher of them all. It is their duty under contract, I believe, to try to prove that the world's going to the devil upon wheels, but you"—

"Very well, Weyland, very well, call me pessimist, or any other pet name you choose, but when I can find a young man who will walk boldly into my office, and say:—'Mr. Lonsdale, I am poor and in need of work. I do not profess to understand your business very well, but if industry, and sobriety and application will satisfy you, I would like you to give me a trial. I have no recommendation. You will have to take me entirely on my own'—I say if a young man with an honest face—and I believe in faces, Weyland—and straight-looking eyes—none of your shifting glances for me—should come to me in that manly fashion I'd give him a trial, by George, I would, sir, if his grandfather was the devil, and his grandmother a lineal descendant of the anthropophagi. And I would help him, sir; by George, I would."

"Mr. Lonsdale," said a voice at his elbow—a voice trembling a little from nervous excitement, "I am poor and in need of work. I do not profess to understand your business very well, but if industry and sobriety and application will satisfy you, I would like you to give me a trial. I have no recommendations. You will have to take me entirely on my own." It was Augustus Ames repeating the banker's own words, with a flushed face and nervous voice.

Mr. Lonsdale reddened angrily. "How, now, young man. Did you take my words for the text of a very flimsy joke?"

"No, sir, I am as much in earnest, as I hope you are."

Three pair of surprised eyes were looking at him.

"It means this, sir. My father wishes me to study for the ministry. I cannot do it. Nor can I any longer burden him with my support. I want work.

I would rather find it near home than farther off. But work I must do."

"Is not this Judge Weyland's nephew?" asked the banker, not yet quite recovered from his surprise.

"Deny me, Gus, deny me, if you find the connection likely to injure you, says the Judge cheerfully, for he sees that Augustus is growing nervous under the critical gaze of the clear-sighted business man and he wants to sustain him in this new course of manly independence.

"Yes, sir. But I am afraid Judge Weyland can tell you very little good of me, for I know more myself. I have been an idle, repining dog. I want to go to work, and all I ask is to be taken on trial."

"Your hand, boy. Timothy Lonsdale never yet went back of his own words and he's not going to do it now. You shall have the trial you ask for."

"To commence when, sir?"

"Tomorrow, if you choose."

As he rises to say good-bye, Uncle Weyland puts one hand kindly on his shoulder; "I am proud of you, my boy, you've seized the helm boldly," he says to him, with a warmer pressure of the hand than usual. Paul, too, says something complimentary about "bricks" and "trumps," but Augustus seems in a hurry to get away from them all. He wants to go off somewhere by himself; not even Paul would be welcome company just then. He has taken a bold plunge, and he feels slightly nervous after it. He goes out through the big iron gate, and walks and walks, not towards home, but out toward the hill which the Wickam people call "Sunset Hill."

He mounts to its summit, and sees below him all Wickam. The sun is nearing the horizon, and has used his waning strength to set all the windows in the houses down yonder ablaze with glory. He lingers lovingly about the tree-tops, gilding the branches of the tall cotton-woods that point upwards like glittering church spires. He dips here and there with great golden splashes into the heaving bosom of the little river that runs so rapidly by Wickam, as if it had a world of business to dispatch before it can hope to find rest in Ocean's broad bosom.

The sunlight fades from window, tree-top and river, and rests only on him, bathing him in a flood of yellow light.

He accepts it as the chrism of his baptism in the new life of manly endeavor.

He is glad no one sees fit to wander up to Sunset Hill that evening; with folded arms he looks down upon the town, seeing in its hurrying, bustling, jostling crowds a meaning for the first time. Every one seemed to have been doing something in the world but himself; only he had been as idle as the idle motes in sunny ray. But now he had joined the laboring many. This dreaming evening on Sunset Hill, with the bars of gold fading sadly then into bars of lead, would see, maybe, his last of idle dreaming.

With the coming day would dawn his day of trial.

His day of trial! As if life itself was not one prolonged trial of "cruel nockings and scourgings. Yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MOTHER'S PLEA.

"Happy be
With such a mother! Faith in womankind
Beats with his blood; and trust in all things
high
Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall
He shall not bind his soul with clay."

—Tennyson.

To the minister's wife, looking forward with a great dread to the day, when her son should be summoned once more before his father—a man, whose will in all the long years of her married life, she had never known yield to tears or supplication—the two weeks, during which, to her tender soul, the fate of the nation seemed trembling in the balances, made cruel haste to speed them to the land of yesterdays.

So Augustus, whose employer, Mr. Jonsdale, though far too cold a man of dollars to be lavish of wordy commendation, was treating him with daily increasing cordiality, which he chose to interpret into tokens of satisfaction—they passed away indifferent, slowly. He was anxious for that final interview, and yet all his new-found courage could not assure him against some decidedly nervous twinges and a prophetic weakening about the knee-joints whenever he thought about it.

The moral atmosphere of the parsonage, never any too bracing, was depressing enough during that probationary period to have given the lightest-

hearted humming bird that ever sucked a rose, a fit of the vapors. But for the absence of crape streamers and a prevalence of wet pocket handkerchiefs, one might easily have been pardoned for asking which room the body lay in.

The fateful morning dawned, and the fateful words: "I would like to see you in my library, Augustus," were spoken by the minister, as before, at the close of the morning meal.

There was a certain strange gentleness of voice and manner about the clergyman that morning. A gentleness, springing perhaps from the same source whence comes the gentleness of some stern judge, about to dole out to a fellow-sinner the awful sentence of earthly condemnation, that is to bar him out forever from God's sun, which he made to shine upon the just and upon the unjust.

"I will be with you presently, father," Augustus answered, not leaving his seat just yet, but playing a tremulous tattoo with his spoon upon the edge of his coffee-cup, secretly hungering for "mother," to say something brave and encouraging.

But Mrs. Ames has nothing brave and encouraging to say. She thinks the son is right, but it is not for her to pronounce the father wrong. She sends one imploring look after the stern-faced Judge, which unfortunately, takes effect only upon the dingy cord and tassel which confines Mr. Ames's dressing-gown loosely about his waist.

Susie pushes her plate from her with a peevish shove. Life is made a burden to her by reason of "father's iron will and Gus's stupid obstinacy."

It would be much nicer, and more comfortable she was sure, for all of them, if Gussy would only do as father wished and be a minister. Where was the great objection? He had to make a living somehow or other, and she sure was being a minister was a very easy way, and then it was so genteel. And Gussie would never have to go rusty and seedy like father. He was so handsome that the women of his congregation would suffocate him in slippers and dressing gowns, and white satin stoles, and never let him want for anything; she only wished she had his eyes and his opportunities.

Augustus looked at this sister of his, who was so flippantly suggesting embroidered slippers and white satin stoles, as advantageous offsets to the darkest

manner of perjury, with a sad sense of Susie's utter unlikeness to a sister he knew of, a sister who made the sunshine and the peace of a home.

But as long as Gussy was so bent upon money-making (and she was sure money must be a delightful thing to have), why could not father give up for once in his life! She did believe, that right under that roof, where it was popularly supposed they were all too ripe for heaven to feel the trials of earth, there was more wretchedness than in all the town besides.

"Hush! Sue. Your peevishness, I am sure, is one of the prime sources of that very wretchedness."

"Oh! of course it is I; I am the root of all evil. It is I who have made the house like a grave-yard by refusing to become a minister. It is I who have been stupifying myself with"—

"Susan."

She halts abashed, to see before her her mother, with pale face and reproachful eyes, and her brother waiting for the completion of her cruel sentence, with a darkly flushed brow, and flashing eyes.

"Father is waiting, Augustus," Mrs. Ames says gently, and he gets up and goes away.

He found his father seated in his big leathern chair—a chair which has taken in a certain stiff, stern physiognomy of its own, from long association with the unbending rector of Wickam Church. Mr. Ames does not proffer a seat to his son. The handsome rebel stands before his father, one hand resting lightly on the desk, from which so many warnings of the wrath to come, so many threats of appalling nature, have been fulminated, waiting for the question.

"Well. You have come prepared with your answer I presume."

"Yes, sir."

"Go on."

There is no token of agitation about the stern old rector, unless, maybe, it was in a certain huskiness of his voice, or in the white glistening knobs of his knuckles, which show what a fierce grip he has fastened upon the arms of his chair.

"I cannot do as you wish me father. Forgive what you choose to call my rebellion, but I cannot go into the pulpit."

St. John Ames gazed into the determined face of his son mutely, but with

such a strange white agony creeping slowly up over his stern strong face, that Augustus sprang forward in alarm.

"Back! I need none of your assistance; I will have none. I have asked it but once in your life, that once you have refused it. You have braved me; you, the son of my loins, the only inheritor of my name, have foiled me in the dearest wish of my life. It is heaven's just punishment upon me for forming any wish reaching out presumptuously into the future, which is no man's land to build upon. You have held my expressed desire as if no more moment than the winds that blow unheeded about your ears. You have robbed me of the staff upon which I had hoped to lean when my strength failed me and my steps tottered as I went about the Master's work. When they brought you to me in your swaddling clothes, I took you in my arms and I blessed you and I blessed God, rejoicing with exceeding great joy, that in His goodness He had seen fit to send me a man-child. And I said in the boastfulness of my sinful heart, I am not young, this child has come to me to be my strong and trusty prop—to finish, it may be, the works of my hand when God calls me home. In this hope I reared you—in this hope I have lived until this hour. You defy me—you disobey me—yet One—whose shoe-latchet earth's best and mightiest are not worthy to unloose, did not scorn to drain the cup of mortal agony to its bitterest dregs at a father's bidding."

"But I drivel. You have abdicated a son's duties; it is but just you should forfeit his claims. Henceforth, you are to me as other men—poor, blind stumblers—to be saved through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, with a heart to be cleansed through the Blood of the Lamb—nothing nearer, nothing dearer. You understood that a persistence in your disobedience was to absolve me from all future responsibility upon the score of your career and your support?"

"I did sir; and have acted upon that understanding."

"Have acted?"

"Yes, sir; and have found employment as assistant cashier in Mr. Lonsdale's banking house."

Great cords knotted themselves about the rector's wrinkled forehead, and his face flushed to a deep purple, while a

long convulsive thrill shook his whole frame. Hope died hard in the old man's breast.

Until Augustus made that calm, practical statement of what he had actually done, his father had clung to the hope that when the boy saw in what deadly earnest he was, the old habit of almost child-like submission would reassert itself, and the darling wish of his heart would be gratified. But the boy stood there before him, meting him out new coldness for the old coldness, new sternness or the old sternness, new determination for the old iron determination which he had brought to bear upon his child in singleness of purpose, in purity of soul, but in sad forgetfulness that it is well always to temper justice with mercy.

"Did I understand that you had been employed by Mr. Lonsdale?" He finds voice again, but it is a pitifully trembling and husky voice.

"Yes, father; 'have' been employed." The young man speaks very gently and very patiently; for, in presence of his father's great and bitter disappointment—how great and how bitter—the rector (shaken for once out of his stony reserve), betrays in his trembling voice, in his almost pleading eyes. Augustus finds it in his heart to forgive all the weary, by-gone years that have been crowded so full of harsh admonitions, merciless censures and bitter reproaches for his own youthful short-comings, and only sees before him the father, whose pride of will, whose dearest wishes have been laid low through his agency. So it comes very easy for him to be gentle and patient and pitying.

A long silence. In which the minister's right hand rises and falls upon the arm of his chair, with a slow, muffled thud, as if he were nailing down the coffin-lid, in which lay his dead hope, his darling, pale and lifeless, with closed lids and frozen pulses.

One long, convulsive sigh flutters through his tightly-closed lips. It is the father's last protest.

When he speaks again all the sorrow-born softness had fled his face, leaving it cold, and stern and familiar.

"It will be hard for your mother to give you up."

Augustus starts convulsively, and his bearded lip quivers: "Father, you would not be so merciless?"

"Why should I be annoyed with the presence of Mr. Timothy Lonsdale's clerk?"

"For mother's sake, not for mine, I ask you not to close your doors against me."

"Go! You have gained your point in a mighty matter. Why should I contend with you over a little one? Whether you occupy a room in this house or do not, is a matter of paltry insignificance. I am tired, I wish to be alone."

Augustus leaves him, and goes straightway to his comforter.

"Mother, I hope I have been lord of myself. I think she would have smiled on me today. But it has been an ordeal;" and then he tells her all about the fateful interview and its out-come.

She thanks God it is over, and is grateful that her boy is to be allowed to remain under the parental roof. She had feared the worst from her husband's well-known implacability.

So Augustus goes away to the bank every morning, and comes home every day after banking hours, and things at the parsonage look pretty much as usual, excepting that between father and son runs a frozen current of etiquette, chilling nature's warm pulses until they almost cease to beat at all.

The father's case is sadder than the son's—as long as hope lives, the heart cannot die. But all hope in the future had died for the gray minister, when he had to put away from him the one hope of having his son labor by his side in the Lord's vineyard. The laborers were so few! But henceforth, there was nothing but one dreary round of duty before him, stretching onward until it reached the peaceful grave. He did not repine at the leaden prospect; only somehow, he did not believe that he would find it very hard to go if God should see fit to call him hence. The twilight of existence had closed in about him.

For Augustus, it was still radiant noon-day. And far up in the skies, just now a little clouded, by reason of his father's implacable resentment, the sun of a brightening present, and a promising future, shone resplendently. He went about the new order of things bravely at first, nourished by hope and love, but who does not know how faint the heart will grow after-while, and how wan the cheek, if nothing be added to these two for the soul's sustenance.

So, after a brave while, the new Augustus flagged a little, and his eyes lost their bright hopefulness, and his step its elasticity.

"What is it, my son?" asks the comforter, laying a caressing hand upon her boy's glowing brow.

"Mother, it all begins to feel so much like a dream. Never to see her—never to hear her sweet voice—never to hear of her, even—I begin to wonder if there really is a Lucy Samuels, or if I have dreamed it all."

"Why not write to her," suggests the comforter, daringly.

"Oh, mother, would you?" His face grows radiant at the very idea.

"I would."

And the same mail which carries out to Miss Samuels an humble, imploring letter from the son, asking just for an occasional friendly letter, to keep his heart from starving, carries, also, a letter from the mother, written and despatched with more secrecy than in all her poor simple life Maria Ames had ever before practised.

This is the letter which she wrote with such nervous trembling, and stole guiltily out of the house to mail with her own hands.

"MY DEAR MISS SAMUELS:—I know I am doing a very unusual thing in the writing of this letter. Maybe, an unprecedented thing; but I do not believe you are one of those common-place girls who must have a well-established precedent for every word and act. Read this letter, whatever you may think of the writer, please, patiently and carefully; for I am afraid its full import may not come to you at a first or a careless reading.

My only and very dear son, Augustus, has returned from your neighborhood, transformed from a sad-faced, dreaming, aimless boy into a happy, resolute, and hopeful man. Transformed, dear Miss Samuels, by his overmastering affection for yourself. I do not know you, but I do know your family, and I can imagine what manner of girl it is, who has gained such boundless influence over my son's wayward nature.

Augustus has been the source of much mental anxiety and grave distress to his family. It is not easy for a mother to acknowledge that her patient love, her fervid prayers, her tender exhortations, have all failed to accomplish, what you, with your sweet face and kind words have accomplished, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps unwillingly. I have been careful to extract from my son every word of yours, which, in his blinded love, he

construes into encouragement. I can see nothing in your gentle expressions to warrant his bounding hope, that some day or other, when he has made his mark in the world, your hand will be the reward of his patient devotedness.

But his delusion is his salvation. It is the dread that he may come to see things as I see them, which inspires me with the daring to write this letter to you.

The fond hope of some day calling you his wife is all the foundation of his new strength, manliness, and resolution. Be pitiful, and leave him his dear delusion; for awhile, at least. Then, maybe, grown strong through love, he may be better able to bear a crushing truth manfully.

You will wonder, perhaps, what manner of woman it is, who asks you to stoop to deception, that her son may be spared a pang! I pause, and wonder if I am asking you to do wrong. I hardly know. What with a mother's intense yearning over an erring son, what with the sad recollection of how powerless her own efforts have proven, maybe I am getting right and wrong confused. Go to your brother. I know him. Pure, strong, without fear, and without reproach. Ask him if he wanted to medicine a sick soul—if he would not tenderly leave it a cherished delusion—rather than start it into torturing knowledge of the truth, simply because it was the truth.

I do not share my son's hope that you will ever be his wife. I can detect in all he has told me nothing but the fervid heat of his own passion infusing a factitious warmth into your gentle expressions of friendship.

But I, his mother, who have tremblingly watched him, vacillating between the poles of negative goodness and positive evil, stretch out my hand eagerly to you as to a powerful ally in my child's salvation. Let him dream on, sweet girl. Do not awaken him yet a little while, and a mother's fervent blessing will attend you all your days.

You will think my daring culminates when I tell you that I know it his intention to ask you to write to him now and then. Will you not do it? Grant his request, and God's blessing will be upon you as upon a good, brave girl, who has stepped a little way off the beaten highway of custom to cheer and strengthen a fellow-creature, whose need of such cheer and strength is very sore. Pardon this letter, written by a mother, pleading for her son's earthly redemption."

When Lucy Samuels read this letter, she let fall upon the mother's plea a few gentle, pitying tears, and she made the son's heart glad by a calm, cordial, friendly response to his entreaties for a correspondence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NATURE'S TEACHINGS.

"To him, who in the love of nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language."
—Bryant.

It was Sunday. December's first-born. A radiant, bright-browed herald, ushering in the month, most honored of high heaven, with a glory of earth and air and sky, which seemed mutely proclaiming the glad tidings of great joy that Christendom's jubilee was coming on apace.

It was a day to make the bare fact of existence a source of pleasurable contemplation. So Delphine Staunton found it, as throwing open her shutters, she flung herself upon the low, old-fashioned window-seat, drinking in the fresh, invigorating air, while her gaze wandered abstractedly over all her small demesne.

The grand old forest trees ("the one glory of the place," she called them) were leafless now, their shivering branches sparsely clothed with long fringes of Spanish moss, and through them she could see the little bayou which curved round about the slight eminence on which the house was built. Its waters looked dark and sombre enough, when the willow and cypress clasped shadowy hands across its bosom; but now, with God's bright sunlight falling unhindered upon its dimpling face, they danced and rippled joyously, as if in the fullness of gratitude for their deliverance. The field larks, grown bold from long-time security, scudded busily this way and that way, through the short-brown stubble, congratulating each other upon the brilliant *coup-de-grace*, December had dealt the rains and winds which had made existence so dreary to them. The red-capped wood-peckers hammered away noisily, in scandalous disregard that it was Sunday, and that in it they should do no manner of work.

All nature was redolent with earnest, solemn, tender meaning.

But Nature's Bible teachings are lost upon the very young. In life's earlier years Ego assumes proportions which fills the moral vision to the exclusion of mightier things.

The wants of the present, the hopes of the future, loom too big for the sweet influences of the Pleiades, the pathos of a fading leaf, the dying glory of the grass, to pierce the clogged senses. It is

only in later years when it gradually comes to us to know that, after all, nature is not our hand-maiden, the world is not our foot-stool; when we come out of our shrunken ego, and are lowly enough to learn wisdom of a blade of grass, to receive instruction from the lilies of the field, that nature speaks to us in her grandest voice, like some mighty orator at his best, when conscious that he speaks to those who have ears to hear, and will hear.

This is the why that Delphine, with the great Book of Lessons spread open there before her, gazing upon it with the body's eye alone (like some idle school child, over the task too abstruse), saw no new meaning in the brightly-illuminated page. She only felt vaguely that the yoke she thought so heavy pressed lighter than was its wont. Somehow, life seemed a good and pleasant thing to have.

She was so young, and life was so empty of meaning outside its personal bearing, so full of her small sorrows and smaller joys; there was so much in that personal life for her puny will to direct and settle, that she may be pardoned the egoism which disqualified her for anything better than a sort of sensuous pagan delight in the radiant glory of that Sunday morning.

The day was so brightly inviting, that she wished there was some one there to help her enjoy it. Some one a little higher in the intellectual scale, than Blucher, to go out with her into the blessed sunshine, to keep the day holy in old druidical style, under the branching oaks. When she finally left her window, it was with a great heart-hunger for this some one, impelling her to make one mighty effort to gratify poor humanity's greatest need—the need of sympathy.

Where should she turn for it? To her faithful old sergeant? Poor "Dan"—big-hearted, loyal, simple Dan. He was bubbling over with sympathy of a certain common sort. If she did but tread on a sharp pebble, or contract her brow with transient pain, he was prompt with sympathetic words and sundry useful suggestions about poultices and lotions. But of that higher sympathy, the peculiar property of fine natures, which can attune two souls to one sweet melody, which can catch the glancing meteor as you catch it, hear a grand burst of eloquence with your ears, he was as utterly

devoid as Blucher's self, His mother! She might as well demand sympathy of a wet blanket. Did not Mother Danbury make it a pious rule to quench every burst of enthusiasm over earth's fading glories, by a solemn reminder: That a soul to save she had; a God to glorify? Her own mother! Ah! surely there she had a right to look for it. Maybe she had never gone about procuring it the true way.

Delphine Staunton had never known a real mother, but her ideal mother had been a sort of glorious and glorified compound of gentleness, wisdom and patience. Some one who would come to her when physical pain racked her frame, and by the magic of a cool, soft hand, lull every tortured nerve to rest. Some one who, when life looked dark (and, oh! how dark it can look in the passionate years of youth!) could exorcise the spirit of gloom with words of comforting wisdom. Some one to whom it would be altogether pleasant and easy to pour out one's soul, never doubting that one's sorrows would be shared, one's pleasures doubled at each outpouring.

All this she had known when it was not her birthright. All this might she not know again? She would ask. Perhaps she would receive.

Mrs. Staunton was still in her bedroom, whence she never emerged before ten or eleven in the morning, at which time, she threw Mother Danbury's systematic soul into a perfect frenzy of indignation, by partaking of a lonely *déjeuner à la fourchette*, a cup of *café noir*, being all her civilized stomach could digest, at the barbarous hour the family breakfasted.

Coming straight from her breezy outlook at the window, Delphine could hardly distinguish objects in the sedulously-darkened chamber. Mrs. Staunton did not affect the prying sunbeams. They were naughty, tell-tale children, ready to gossip about crows' feet, and wrinkles, and yellow skins, which art, kinder than nature, helped her hide. But the daughter knew that somewhere within that dingy chamber (a perfect chaos of discarded robes, cast-off slippers, powders, perfumes, pomades, French novels, false hair, and other component parts of a *passé* female) she would find her mother, carelessly enveloped in a morning dress, whose silken facings, furnished a tabu-

lar statement of the number of cups of coffee which the lady had partaken of in true oriental style—reclining, but not with Oriental deftness.

"Mother, is not this day tempting enough to beguile you out of your dark seclusion? It is a delicious, crisp morning. You cannot help enjoying it," she says, sending her voice towards the darkest corner, where she knows the sofa to be located.

Mrs. Staunton slips her finger between the pages of her novel, and executes a deliberate yawn, before replying:

"My sweet daughter, when will you learn, that poor mamma is not strong and vigorous, and buxom, as is her country-raised girl? As it is, I rise far too early for my health's good. But to go out into your crisp, delicious day—as my absurd darling calls it would soon put your troublesome mamma out of everybody's way."

"I thought," says the daughter, hope dying out of her voice, "I might prevail on you to go with me to hear Mr. Samuels."

"To your little house that you call a church! My poor neglected one, grown up in such utter ignorance, that there is but one church, and that one under the direct government of our holy father—the successor to St. Peter—the Prince of Apostles, with whom your pretty-faced M. Samuels has nothing in common. My sweet child, mamma would commit a sin in granting that request of yours."

"But you have seen so little of the country."

"So little, *ma chère*. I have seen your black mud; I have seen your big, ugly, frowning trees; I have seen your tumble-down homes; I have seen your fat kine and your lean kine. Have I left anything unseen? Bah! To think my splendid William could have come out of such a bog. I wonder not that he turned his back upon it forever, and adopted my beautiful France for his country. Ah! My poor little daughter if you could but—"

But Delphine had already grown weary of unkindly comparisons between her native primitive woods and the civilized garden-spots of her mother's beautiful France, of Paris versus Wickam, of Frenchman vice Americans. So she interposed a quick:

"Then you will not come with me."

"No, Delphine, mine. I shall not leave

my room until compelled to by the arrival of your babe of the woods—that superb M. Emile. You remember he dines with us today by appointment.”

“I remember,” says Delphine, a little coldly. “But please, mother, do not use that little ‘your’ so often in connection with myself and M. Girardeau.”

“Why not? Is he not yours by right of discovery? Did you not find him in the woods sick, and bring him home, and nurse him well, like a pretty little Samaritan?”

“Yes,” says Delphine, with a light scornful laugh. “But I think I owed him some compensation for the maltreatment he received at Dan’s hands on my account.”

“And which he has forgiven so nobly. Now, there is a man for you—so elegant, so refined, so *recherché* (if I may use the word) from the curl of his lovely mustache, to the toe of his tiny boots.”

“His polish I admit; it is as patent as that upon his boots. His manliness is not so apparent.”

“And why?” asks Madame, tartly, hoisting the national flag in defence of her countryman—he was French—ergo, he was faultless.

Delphine declines accepting M. Girardeau as sufficient excuse for sharp words.

“There, mother, do not become excited over your pet. I am glad M. Girardeau’s company gives you pleasure, as it is natural it should; you, so far away from your own country, and he the only one you can converse comfortably with, and as your friend, he will always be most welcome. But, pardon me, if I cannot see anything very admirable about the young gentleman.”

“No. Your clumsy, ill-bred Max I suppose is your superb. A man who does not know how to address a lady; a man who constituted himself an amateur detective to prove your own mother a pickpocket and an imposter.”

Grown used now to the darkness, Delphine can see the dark, angry flush, which reddens her mother’s face—can see the loosely-robed form quivering with passion, and the attenuated hand coiled up into a vindictive little fist.

Mrs. Staunton, in her rage, has forgotten that Delphine knows nothing of the distrust and suspicion which she excited upon her arrival. In mercy it had been kept from her. She is reminded by

the girl’s startled eyes and her bewildered—

“Mr. Morgan did what, mother?”

“There! Bah! I have been foolish. I have talked nonsense. Your Mr. Max is a very good man. But my M. Emile is a better. Go, now. I will not talk any more.”

Delphine was very willing to go. She had asked and she had not received. She had reached the door, when her mother recalled her.

“My daughter”—the voice was so serious, so grave indeed, that Della turned, in eager hope of hearing some explanation of that strange speech about Max.

“Well, mother!”

“Could you not, will you not, try, for my sake, dear child, to prevail upon Mother Jeremiah to discard the odious frying-pan today, and give us a little less boiling lard for our dinner. Mamma will feel so grateful.”

Chilled and disgusted, Delphine turned from the door which she had entered in search of the higher sympathy.

Her mother’s wishes respecting the dinner, were dutifully conveyed to Mother Danbury, whose lugubrious habit of lamenting had gained for her from the flippant Frenchwoman the soubriquet of Mother Jeremiah.

Then she and Dan and Mother Danbury went out together to walk through the woods to Mr. Samuels’ little church.

Somehow, the glory of the day had departed, and she walked very silently along, between her two humble friends, drawing irrepressible comparisons between the woman she had just left, lying in a greasy morning dress, reading a French novel, in the midst of disorder and confusion; and Eleanor Morgan—stately, calm-eyed, wise Eleanor Morgan.

She went through the morning service with a dreary indifference, and settled herself to listen to the sermon, caring very little beforehand what its purport might be.

“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”

She started and turned her lustrous eyes full upon the minister’s gentle face. Was he preaching at her? Had he dived into her soul and brought up the knowledge that she found her yoke heavy to bear? Was it her burden that had furnished him a text? Was it her ha-

ed to comfort, by showing how it was good that she should bear it now in the days of her youth. She almost expected to see those holy, tender eyes, turn pitifully upon her. But when she saw them glance calmly, lovingly around, taking in all his little flock, addressing his words of comfort to all who bent beneath this world's heavy yoke with the light of a great wide-reaching, pity-shining about him, like a halo, she bowed her head abashed and humbled—blushing for her own egoism—for she knew then, that not she alone, bent beneath a rod—and she was young—it was well—he said—that she should bear the yoke in her youth.

Perhaps! But who will refuse a dole of pity to the young heart called upon so suddenly to see its excellence, when all the time she is but conscious that it presses very sore, and the tender flesh rebels and quivers in impotent but natural rebellion.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHILDREN OF INIQUITY.

"He raised a mortal to the skies.
She drew an angel down."

—Dryden.

As the clock struck eleven Mrs. Staunton reluctantly laid aside her novel and prepared to manufacture herself for the day. An operation which consumed daily two or three hours of precious time, to say nothing of those less valuable commodities, serious meditation and absorption of soul.

The announcement that M. Emile Girardeau was below in no manner hastened her deliberate movements. "Presently," she said, turning her head slightly towards the small ebony messenger who made the announcement, revealing a face pearl-tint and saffron by sections.

Satisfied, finally, with her own vastly improved appearance (for since Mrs. Weyland's supervision of herself and her toilette, the greasy shabbiness had all disappeared), she glided down the carpeted stairway with her own cat-like noiselessness, to surprise her visitor, standing in the rapt adoration of a devotee before a framed likeness of pretty Lucy Samuels.

"*Charmante, n'est-ce pas?*" says a spiteful voice close to his ear, and M. Girardeau turns to greet his hostess.

Mrs. Staunton led the way to a sofa, intimating by a gracious wave of her hand that he was to share it with her.

"You come, reluctantly at a late hour, to give a report of your progress," Mrs. Staunton says, addressing herself to her visitor in their own language, and in tartly peremptory voice of a privileged monitor.

M. Girardeau glanced about him carefully.

He need not—they have the house all to themselves. Blucher, sunning himself upon the front steps, and the colored waif who had opened the door to him, being the only breathing things besides themselves, and neither Blucher nor Tony are French scholars.

"Suppose I tell you I have no progress to report."

"You dare not tell me so. I have waited long for this opportunity. Now I will hear it all."

"And yet, now that the opportunity has come, you make it so late that all the good church people will be back upon us before we have begun to talk."

"No, it is the first day of the month. They stay to drink their wine and eat their bread, which they call communing. We have plenty of time before us. Come! How have you progressed?"

"In a knowledge of this villainous language, passably; in a great disgust for myself, rapidly; in your handsome daughter's favor, not at all, I fear me."

"That is not strange. I see you here but seldom."

"Until Madame's arrival, the proprietress forbade. Mlle. Staunton is a very maiden of snow. While I was sick and helpless she was good and tender. When I got well and—"

"Dangerous!" Madam interpolates, scornfully.

"She froze into a beautiful statue of snow."

"What means have you adopted for melting that snow? For melted, you know, it *must be*."

"Every means which courtesy and American etiquette would allow."

"Emile, do not try to deceive me. It is worse than useless. I know as well as you can tell me how things stand. You have fallen in love with the wrong girl. Very well. I make no objection. You may love whom you please, and as many as you please; but you cannot marry whom you please nor as many as you

please. Give your pretty, golden-hair saint all your poor, little, battered-up heart, but your hand belongs to Delphine Staunton."

The Frenchman's cane was tracing tipsy hieroglyphics all over the carpet while she was speaking, and when she ceased, it pointed her sentence with a sonorous period.

"Are you not yet satisfied? You have your daughter. Why trouble yourself about me? Let me go, and I promise on the honor of a gentleman, never to molest you by word or deed."

"On the honor of a gentleman! Oh, you silly boy. There, no more nonsense. I cannot grant you many such interviews as this, for I do not know you. I never saw you before my daughter introduced you to me in this very dingy, old room. Bah! these Southern Americans. What do they know of life? They have their big bodies of land, they have their big crowds of blacks, they live in their tumble-down houses, they fare worse than the shopkeepers of Paris—and they call it living."

"What has all that to do with our business?" asks the Frenchman, looking sulen and speaking rudely.

"True, nothing. But when you and my daughter are married, we will change all that. As you say, I have my daughter. And when that daughter is properly married, my comfort for life will be secured. Remember our contract."

"I am not apt to forget it, with you for my Mephistopheles."

"Maybe, no. But I can detect signs of restlessness about you which must be calmed, else restlessness may give birth to an ugly and troublesome offspring of resistance, treachery, and betrayal."

"I have told you, you need not fear me. All I ask is freedom to follow my newer and better inclinations."

"Freedom is just what you cannot have."

"I thought it was to be one or the other—you or I—a husband or a mother?"

"Mutual safety demands that it should be both."

"What avail my daughter's big fortune unless I marry her to a husband of my own choice? You, a son of *la belle France* should find it come natural to have a parent settle these little *affaires de cœur*."

"But Mademoiselle's self! I have reason to like her. She is a brave, splendid girl. She has been kind to me. What has she done to me that I should cross the wide ocean to meddle thus impertinently with her lot in life?"

"Emile Girardeau, you have been just long enough with those hymn-singing, praying Samuels to become white-livered and putty-souled, like them. Your nerves are all melted into wax. This thing was all arranged long ago. You dare not recede. In France we do not recognize a daughter's preference. In due course of time you ask, and she shall say 'yes.' You know that you dare not oppose me."

"How about Madame's self?"

"Madame is secure; you cannot injure her."

A stare of astonishment, not unmingled with a certain look of fear, was fastened on her face by her countryman.

"Read that!" She flung a printed slip of paper into his lap.

As he read he turned very white, and when he handed it back there was that cowed look about the man that one may notice about a completely conquered hound.

"Now then, no more disagreeables for today. It was a bitter dose, but I had to administer it by way of anodyne. You were growing restless. What were we talking about? Oh, my daughter. If she had her own way she would eventually give her hand and fortune to M. Max. That she shall never do. I hate him. He doubted me, and he was not gentleman enough to hide his doubts."

"Doubted you! Monstrous!" (Conquered hounds will sometimes snarl and snap in an impotent fashion, you perceive).

"Come! M. Emile is not in a pleasant humor. He must be in one before his intended wife comes home, else, I fear, his wooing will speed but poorly."

"Madame!"—Emile Girardeau raised his eyes towards Mrs. Staunton (who had risen, and was standing over him, with a beseeching look in them)—

"I have done much for you—enough to damn me eternally; for you, or, to put it more justly, at your instigation, I stooped for the first time in my life to deceptions, lies, and treachery. When I left my master's office it was with the proud consciousness that he be-

lieved in me. For gold I have sold my soul. The gold is not yet mine; the contract may yet be nullified; let us enter into a new one."

A laugh full of scorn interrupted him, and once more that hideous paper was unfolded in Mrs. Staunton's hand, while she said, with biting emphasis:

"I am afraid Monsieur did not read this paragraph carefully enough. His knowledge of English is imperfect. I will take great pleasure in reading it to him, for it is necessary for his welfare that he should understand how easily I can send the information demanded by this 'Notice' to the first police station. And just think how the ugly story would sound in pretty, golden-haired Lucy's ears!"

The terror inspired by her horrible suggestion wrung great drops of mortal agony from the pallid brow of the man before her.

"Bah! We grow theatrical when we should be business-like and cool. You are but a clumsy tool, after all, Emile. I had a better opinion of you. But come, you were never known to have nerve for much until you had gone to the brandy-bottle for it."

The Frenchman did not await a second bidding. Following his hostess into the adjoining room, he watched her motions with feverish eagerness, as she unlocked her private *escritoire* and extracted from it a small wicker flask, full of the nerve-strengthening liquor.

Mrs. Staunton filled two glasses equally full, offered one to her guest, clinked her own merrily against it, and with the rollicking air of a *vivandiere*, tossed it off to the last drop.

"There's to stratagem and spoil," says the *vivandiere*, wiping her stained lips upon a dainty bit of cambric.

"And to treason," mutters Emile Girardeau, draining his glass with feverish eagerness.

"Now, then, we can talk more comfortably. M. Garçon will not have the vapors any more today. Life looks differently after the first glass of brandy. That is, if the brandy is the right sort. It is all in the quality of your drink, my boy, whether the world is a heaven or a hell—life a blessing or a curse. My brandy is good—life will look pleasant to you today. You love your blue-eyed Lucy Samuels?"

"By heavens, I do!"

"You cannot marry her, Monsieur; Max loves my daughter; he cannot marry her. So where is your case so hard? It is the case of half the men alive."

"Now talk to me about yourself."

Cheered by the brandy, M. Girardeau cast care to the dogs, and when, some little time after, Delphine appeared in the drawing-room, calm and lily-pure, in happy unconsciousness that they, her mother and the man she had tended in sickness so assiduously, had spent that bright morning in conspiring against her happiness, she found the visitor entertaining her mother as only he could, by a brilliant and amusing description of his experience as a French and drawing master.

Indignant as Mother Danbury was at having God's holy day of rest broken by the presence of a stranger to dine, her reputation as a notable housekeeper was too dear to her soul to admit of any neglect regarding the dinner.

Her own personal supervision was necessary for the preparation of the viands, and for the proper laying of the table.

The dining-room door had hardly closed upon her diminutive figure when it opened again, and a shrill: "Alexander!" went whistling through the wide hall.

Sergeant Danbury responded promptly, and reached the dining-room, to find his mother, her small black eyes ablaze with righteous indignation, armed with two cut-glass goblets, which she presented at him with truly soldierly activity.

"Alexander, smell that!" presenting arms with the right hand goblet.

Alexander sniffs obediently at the weapon, and says, "Brandy!"

"And that!" firing the second goblet at his nose.

"Brandy again!" says Dan, promptly.

"Now look at that, and at that, and at that," says Mother Danbury, her indignant finger skipping with lively rage from one dark tell-tale spot to another on the white marble slab of the side-board.

"Well, mother?"

"It is not well, Alexander. It is very far from well. Belial's daughter and Belial's son have spent the Lord's blessed Sabbath morning drinking brandy."

"How did they get here?" asks Dan, innocently.

"How did who get here, Alexander?"

"Belial's folks."

Dan's mother groans in anguish of spirit, and wipes the dark spots from the marble, making it glisten with her vigorous touch; wishing, in her pious heart, it was as easy to wipe the dark spots of ignorance from her benighted son's soul.

"I mean, my son," she explained, in that voice of pitying patience, one employs in addressing an embecile, "that Mrs. Staunton and the French tramp you and that giddy child picked up out of the mire have been drinking brandy together this morning."

"Oh! no—"

"Oh! Yes."

"Him, maybe; but not the master's wife, mother."

"What did he want with two glasses?"

"Maybe he took two drinks."

"Couldn't fill the same glass twice, I suppose?" says the female detective, with an unchristianlike sneer.

"Could, but might not choose to."

"Hush talking to me, Alexander. You are too good or too simple, one or both, to get along in this world. When you and the child brought home your sick Frenchman my heart misgave me. I knew no good would ever come of dealing with one of them creatures from a strange land, worshippers of candles and images, followers of the scarlet woman; and here, just when a body gets well rid of one down swoops another. I've got no opinion, anyway, of folks that can't remain quietly in the land it has pleased God to place them. That foreign beggar don't come prowling around here for no h'ing. And as for the French mother—"

"Mother!" says loyal Dan, interrupting her in a short, quick voice, "it is the master's wife and the little lady's mother you're handling now. If you can't feel respectful, we'd best talk so, anyhow. I'm sorry to anger you, but we musn't forget our position, whatever comes."

"You've not angered me, Alexander. I am getting quite used to being put under foot, even by my own born son."

Dan turned away without any more words, and sought solace in his pipe, feeling more firmly convinced than ever that it took all sorts of people to make a world, and that quite a spicy variety of

the sorts were gathered together, that day, in the old homestead. But one of his mother's assertions he could not credit.

He might believe, with the Hindoos, that the universe is supported on the back of a big porpoise! Believe with the Mahommedans, that their Prince of humbugs (the circumstantial evidence of his old shoe to the contrary, notwithstanding) was translated painlessly to the realms of bliss! Believe with the wandering Tartar, that his grand Lama never dies, but migrates from one youthful body to another, always young and fresh. Might muster credulity for almost any of the insanely incredible beliefs extant; but believe that the master's wife would touch a drop of brandy! Never! If his own eyes had seen it, he would still have said, Never! If his own ears had heard the clinking of her glass against the Frenchman's, loyal Dan would still have said, Never!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. MORGAN TURNS BOHEMIAN.

"For, down the silvery tide afar,
There came a boat, as swift and bright
As shines in heaven some pilgrim star,
That leaves its own high home at night,
To shoot to distant shrines of light."

—Moore.

It was early in the spring following Mrs. Staunton's unlooked-for and unwelcome immigration, that Mr. Morgan, returning from his law-office at the usual hour in the afternoon, hanging up his hat, and laying down his cane with the deliberate precision of incipient bachelorhood, entered the family sitting-room and threw his small household into a perfect flutter of astonishment and dismay by announcing his intention of starting for Europe two weeks from that evening, making as little ado over it as if he had informed Eleanor of his intention to order mutton instead of beef from the butcher's boy next morning.

Not that Europe was such a terra-incognita, or so inaccessible, that for anyone to seek to reach it should be matter for either astonishment or dismay; but Max had so little of the Bohemian about him that his sisters were almost as well prepared to see the majestic old elm tree, that had shaded their back porch ever since it had been a porch, take up its trunk and start on a pedestrian

as to hear that Max (as firmly wedded to his profession, as the elm to the soil) meditated a sea voyage.

"Going to Europe, brother?" says Evelyn, making exclamation points with her arched brows (either he or she must be mistaken).

"Europe, Max?" Eleanor echoes, more faintly; for her surprise is by no means as lively as Evelyn's.

"Yes, to Europe." Max repeats his news with the calmness, and the unsatisfactoriness of a sphinx, vouchsafing neither comment nor explanation.

"I will not require much preparation in the way of baggage, Eleanor. My business warrants my taking a partner into my office now, and I need only delay my departure long enough to familiarize him with such as I have on hand.

"I wonder what this strange move on brother's part means?" asks Evelyn of Eleanor, in the privacy of their own room that night.

Eleanor did not answer. She believed she knew very well the motive for this journey. Knew that Max missed the "child" more than he cared to acknowledge. Believed that this sudden departure for new and unfamiliar scenes was nothing but an effort on his part to rouse himself from the dull, leaden indifference to everything, that was settling down upon him (in spite of his own fierce self-denunciation for pusillanimity, and all that sort of thing), cramping his mental energies and clipping the wings of his ambition.

But she did not care to tell all her conjectures to Evy, dear as the gentle invalid was, for the two-fold reason that this great heart-bereavement of Max's, which she had possessed herself of, was too sacred a thing to be made matter of comment, and that it was a time-honored rule with herself and Max to keep from Evelyn everything that could add one shadow's bulk to the great black cloud under which her whole blameless life was doomed to pass.

The void made by Delphine's departure had been felt very keenly by all three of them, as witness the tenderness displayed in the careful gathering up of every half-forgotten possession of the "child's"—the half sad, half pleasant reminders of how Della had done this thing or loved that thing. But women, after the first passionate out-cry against fate, can make up their minds to the al-

teration in all their life-plans, more quickly and more thoroughly than can that prouder and more wilful sex who resent the interference of destiny as an impertinence not to be submitted to without an obstinate protest, a futile effort, as it were, to contest the will of Providence, and prove it invalid.

To Miss Morgan and Evelyn, living and moving altogether within the contracted sphere of home, the house was quieter and emptier and sadder for the "child's" exodus, but the round of a woman's never-ending duties rolled peacefully on, the days went gliding by.

To Max, coming home from the outside world (which was nothing but a great, busy, noisy workshop, in which he must toil with the rest of the gold-seekers and fame manufacturers until his self-appointed task was done), and missing the sweet face he had learned to love so well, the girlish voice rippling in laughter, or swelling in song, the ready ministrations of her busy little hands, the house seemed but a sepulchre for pleasant memories.

He took himself severely to task for this unmanly and unavailing regret, but all the same, it staid with him, haunted him, dogged him, and finally impelled him to try the Lethean properties of the Atlantic Ocean.

The appointed day for his departure came. His trunk was packed and standing in the hall, waiting for the van which was to carry it to the depot. Evelyn was bedewing his fresh handkerchief which she had taken from him, to "put a little more cologne on it," with tears and cologne in impartial proportions. Eleanor was carefully twisting and untwisting all the little paper parcels in his satchel, to make very sure that nothing had been forgotten. Max himself, was brushing his hat with a strangely nervous hand. After all, this journey was to be something of a wrench, and he found that there were some very lively emotions, totally disconnected with Delphine, thumping up and down under his vest.

Delphine had been to pay her old home several visits, since being torn from it; but, as she expressed it, sobbing the while: "What good did it do to come there in hat and kid gloves, and sit up in the parlor playing lady." Nevertheless, she had promised to come again.

"What shall I say to Della for you?"

asks Eleanor, clasping the satchel with a snap, as if the question had not come quite easily.

Max looks at her with a strange surprise in his fine eyes. Did she think he would place the salt ocean between him and his darling without the poor consolation of a good-by?

"Nothing. I shall go down to tell her good-by."

"Max," says the sister, laying her long, shapely hand in tender warning on his shoulder, "You will be strong. Promise me you will neither say nor do anything rash when you see her. For her sake, as well as yours, promise me."

"You need fear nothing. She is rich. You were wise in that disclosure. It is the strongest barrier you could have interposed, otherwise—"

A rumble of wheels, a convulsive embracing all round, and Max was gone, and the two women weeping in that hopeless fashion that women will weep in, so long as their hearts are more active than their heads.

Arrived at the homestead, Mr. Morgan gave his name to Tony, with repeated and impressive injunctions to inform Miss Staunton she was wanted. To his disappointment, Mrs. Staunton came gliding into the room and up to where he sat, offering a hand which he dare not refuse to clasp, yet which he could not accept in amity.

"Ah, M. Max, is it possible you have found time from those big law-books to pay a friendly visit?"

Max explained the occasion of his present visit. It was but to bid his ward good-by before starting for Europe.

"Europe! M. Morgan is on his way to Europe!"

Mrs. Staunton's dark face flushed strangely, her thin fingers closed tightly about the handle of her fan, and she eyed her visitor with a furtive, cat-like intensity, as if she would pry into his very soul.

But Max, so conscious of the why of this voyage, so unwilling that any eye should read his secret, was not looking at his hostess, else her queer discomposure might have set his cool brains to work on an almost forgotten trail.

The sad abstraction in his eye reassured her.

Of course M. Morgan would visit her beautiful France?"

"Eventually he might. His primary

destination was Scotland, to see a people and a country he most ardently admired."

"Was he to remain absent long?"

"That was a question he was not able to answer satisfactorily to himself as yet."

Then M. Morgan grew restive.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Staunton, but as I have but an hour or two at my disposal, may I ask to have Delphine summoned at once?"

"It is I who should beg pardon for not having told Monsieur before that my daughter is not at home. The giddy thing; she is so wild and wilful. One might as well try to cage a butterfly as to keep her in-doors."

Why was it that Max felt a something wonderfully like resentment rising in his breast against Delphine, "wild and happy?"

"But surely, this quiet neighborhood cannot furnish many temptations to giddiness or wildness."

"Not many, but such as they are, the child seems never weary of them. Two-thirds of her time, is spent with her friend Miss Lucy Samuels; an altogether unexceptionable person, I believe," adds Mrs. Staunton kindly.

"I should call Miss Samuels, from what Delphine has told me of her character, a decidedly advantageous companion for your daughter."

"Sly puss! and what has she told you of the brother?"

"Of the brother?" says Max, sharply; "nothing, but that he was a good sincere Christian."

"Oh! These girls! These girls! Why, do you know, my dear M. Max, I believe that child would try to deceive me, her own mother, into thinking that it is the Sister Samuels she is so adoringly in love with, when her very shyness, her blushes, her tremor when the violet-eyed minister looks at her (and you know how a handsome young clergyman can use his eyes), tell her great secret. And now I am going to make so very bold. You know, in my beautiful France, we parents have almost entire control of our children's lands; it is as it should be there. But, I have no desire, none, now, to make the parental yoke too heavy for my little one's unaccustomed shoulders. I had hoped always to be able to call upon you for advice; but here you run away, across the big ocean, and I have

no one to go to; I must, then, ask it before you leave. My daughter loves, respects, reveres you. I know if her own beloved father had lived, his words could not have carried more weight with them. When she comes to me, as she will come when you are far away, and says, 'Mother, shall I tell him yes; I who am so ignorant of this Mr. Samuels, would like to be able to answer her just as her 'dear old Max' as the saucy minx calls you, would like to have her answered." A face full of the most amiable respect was turned upon Delphine's revered Max, as her mother waited solicitously for his reply.

Max wished it were it not derogatory to one's manliness to throttle impertinent women, for impertinent speeches. He wondered if this woman's malice had turned his hair white by the power of an evil magic; somehow, her words made him feel so venerable, so antiquated. He wondered if that "giddy butterfly" was in company with the violet-eyed minister, while he set there wasting such a wealth of strong, yearning, hungry passion over her. He was in agony, and despised himself for his powerlessness in this woman's presence.

As his brow grew darker, Madame's became correspondingly serener.

"Ah! How neglectful. Monsieur had not even had a cup of cold water offered him." Her summons brought Tony and the cup of cold water, which Max really needed; it cooled the fire in his brain, and made articulation possible.

"It would be an impertinence for him to assist in forming any plans for her daughter's settlement in life on such slight grounds. He was so sorry Delphine should have selected that particular evening to visit her friends the Samuels."

On what insignificant pivots do the destinies of men often turn. Tony was the pivot; black, insignificant, dull-eyed Tony, was the pivot upon which Mr. Morgan was destined to revolve that morning from the depths of wretchedness to the pinnacle of happiness.

"Miss Delphine down to de B'yer, rowin'," says Tony solemnly, and disappears with his waiter and glasses.

"At the bayou?" says Max, growing radiant; "if you will excuse me, I will join the child there. and make my *aux*." Thus boldly, he took affairs

into his own hands, and with a curt farewell to the mother, walked down to the little bayou, which, in the happy days when the child belonged to them, had been the scene of many a merry boat-race, Evelyn and he in one tiny skiff, Eleanor and the child in another. He had taught her himself how to handle the oars, and right proud had he been of his pupil's skill.

Mrs. Staunton just detained him long enough (holding him by the coat-lapel, and looking at him with such confiding trust), to beg him, now that her little girl had returned in time for him to see her, to give the child some good, wholesome advice before he left. "Talk to her, dear Monsieur Max, as freely as you would to your own daughter, for believe me, she entertains a truly filial affection for you, and I know your counsel will carry such weight with it."

Poor Tony's efforts in the cause of truth were attended with disastrous results. As Madame turns smilingly from bowing her visitor out (smiling, I think, with satisfaction over her Partian dart), that small but veracious boy stood, lucklessly, just close enough at hand to furnish a vent for the lady's pent-up wrath, fear, malice, and all uncharitableness; her feelings, like Bob Acres' valor, escaping at the tips of her fingers, which closed like eagle talons on the boy's ebony ears. And ever after Tony was celebrated for the easy grace of his lies.

When Mr. Morgan reached the grass-fringed banks of the little bayou, he found the object of his search within easy call. But he did not choose to call. Seating himself on the twisted trunk of a water-oak, which cast cool, dark shadows far out over the stream, he waited for her to drift slowly up to where he sat.

Her back was turned to him as the boat glided slowly towards his ambush. She guided her tiny craft with easy but careless grace, dipping the oars deftly into the troubled waters, and watching with idle interest the pearls and diamonds that fell in a glittering shower from the dripping blades, until the last pearly drop had described its own tiny circlet, then ceased to be.

Max was glad she did not see him. He wanted to limn upon memory's faithful tablets the graceful contour of the slight figure, as it bent lightly to her oars, every fold of her white dress, the

long floating ribbons of pale blue, that she had flung backward over her shoulder, the jealous straw hat that hid the dear face from him, granting him but a glimpse of her clear-cut profile, as she turned her eyes now to this bank, now to the other, to "keep her bearings."

It was pleasant to sit there and have her drift slowly, surely, peacefully towards him, straight to him. He chose to accept it as an omen. Towards him, and not towards the violet-eyed minister, as that cruel woman had told him the current of that fresh young life was setting. To him, and not to the youthful pastor, that precious ship was coming in.

A great yearning to stretch wide to her the haven of his strong arms surged up in his soul. He was ready to ask her, the darling of his heart, if she could rest satisfied in the safe anchorage of his mighty affection; ready and waiting. Nearer, still nearer, she was slowly drifting to him. Farther, still farther, just as surely drifted ambition, fear, pride. The perfect love which casteth out all fear, swept in one resistless, mighty wave over him, as he sat there so quiet, under the water-oak. Delphine, his pearl, he must have; else, what was life to him? She was coming straight to him; coming of her own accord. Coming, angel-piloted, to bless him with her presence and her love. The swift-running bayou, was life's strong current; the little skiff, Destiny's argosy, coming in to him richly freighted with all he asked from the Giver of all good.

A low growl from the shaggy out-look upon the prow summoned Max back from cloud-land to see Destiny's argosy shoot, arrow-like, towards the shore farthest from him; to see a welcoming wave of the hand he was yearning so to clasp, thrown towards that other shore; to see a man's long, slender hand part the thick under-growth, and a tall, lithe figure emerge and take its stand close to the grass-fringed banks.

"It is the minister!" he says with bitter emphasis, between teeth close set in a fierce agony of jealous love. "He is fitted to find favor in a young girl's eyes. He is slender and graceful; the eyes that are watching my darling's coming can speak the language of love so well; he is—bah!—his love for this girl robbed me of all the man in my nature. After all, then, it was towards him and not towards me, that the rich argosy came in.

Well, I stand then, just where I stood before I fell to dreaming here in school-boy fashion. I came here to say good-by to the child; she is very dear; how dear, none but the searcher of hearts will ever know. I shall await her coming; their coming; they will come together; well, sooner or later; why not sooner? I should have had to see her coming towards me on some other man's arm; why not today? Why not on the arm of a good man—a gentleman?"

In the quick while he had been vibrating between the extremities of fabled bliss and wretchedness, the skiff had touched the opposite bank, and Delphine was motioning his rival to a seat in the stern.

But the minister declines; he hands her a package; holds her extended hand for a little while in a warm clasp; stays some half dozen seconds talking with the earnest familiarity of a privileged friend; pats Blucher on the head, and, springing lightly up the steep bank, disappears once more within the shadow of the woods.

But he has broken into the girl's idle mood; one or two swift strokes of the oars brings her opposite the water-oak, where Max, risen and freed by a vigorous moral shaking of all his lover's fancy, stands awaiting her coming altogether calmly.

"Max!" Surely it is joy, unmistakable and great joy, that rings so clear and true in her voice.

Mr. Morgan waits barely long enough for the boat to graze the shore, springs lightly in, holds the child's two small hands in his for a brief second, and motioning her to the seat she had offered the minister, he sends the little craft spinning out into the stream once more.

"Now I have you all to myself for a little while. Such a little while, child, it will be that no one need envy me it.

"Who should envy you, Max? And what do you mean by such a very little while? Have you not come down to pay me a good, kind visit?"

"I have come down to say good-by, Delphine, and I have had to be very patient, waiting for you to be done with your new friends."

"But they are good friends, Max," she answers, taking his sentence backward. "I hardly know what would become of me in this new life without Mr. Samuel and Lucy. She is all my company and b

is all my comfort. But, bah. I am full of nothing but myself. You said something about good-by. Have you been at the house long?"

"My good-by is to be a very long one, child. I am en route for Europe!"

If Mr. Morgan had declared himself en route for the moon, he could not have excited livelier surprise.

"Europe, Max! And what for?"

The old trick of asking inconvenient questions.

"I think it will do me good," he answers, leaving the complaint which required the benefit of a sea-voyage undiagnosed.

"Max going away from me! So far away that it is like death; one by one every source of happiness fails me. Oh, Max! Tell me how to stand this altered life. It grinds so; and now, you are going, it's going to be blanker and emptier than ever."

Max lays the oars down, and leaving the little boat to drift where it will, he draws the child near to him; takes her in his arms, and kisses the shining drops from her long lashes.

"Will you be sorry to have me go, Della?"

"Sorry! Oh, Max! Has not life been one prolonged 'sorry' ever since I have had to leave you all?"

"Your mother tells me different. She tells me that you are gay and happy; that your life, as Eleanor told you it would, is being filled up with new hopes, new pleasures, new friends."

"My mother! Who knows less of how my life is spent than she." The girl's eyes flashed at him through indignant tears.

"Come, remember your promise; tell me everything. I am going so far away from you; I would like to carry with me some bright pictures of your new life. Talk to me, will you not, dear child, as you used to talk, when you sat in the little green sofa under the jessamine vines?"

"Ah! My precious home; my beautiful home; how my heart aches for it."

In girlish abandon, she drooped her head until it rested upon her lap, yielding to a passionate burst of tears.

Max waited very patiently. It was easy to be patient, now that he had her "to himself; and while he waited for a d time that day, love threatened to

sweep away every consideration of prudence or expediency.

How mean and poor the very words sounded.

The gusty sobs died away gently. She had raised her head, and was deriving some sort of comfort from calling herself unflattering names; then quickly: "See, Max, we've drifted under the cypress; I hate the shadows; life is so full of them now-a-days."

With one swift stroke of the oar, Max sends the boat far out into the broad sunshine.

"But see how near God's sunshine is to us all the while."

With that God's help, he would make life all sunshine to her; he could not go away thus; he hungered to hear those quivering lips say: "Max, I love you." He would hear it.

"Delphine."

"Ah! You naughty, naughty girl. What a fright mamma has been in about you. Do you suppose she can always guess where you are? Monsieur Max, you must scold her for me; she is turning nut-brown as a gypsy. Be kind and bring the giddy thing to the shore," rang sharply and shrilly out to them from the shore.

Cursing the malicious fate which had clogged him and thwarted him through all that day, Max turned the boat's prow in the direction of the voice.

"You naughty girl. A pretty account I was able just now to give of you to poor, anxious Monsieur Samuels, who sat so patiently waiting for you to come in."

"Mr. Samuels," said Delphine, looking at her mother with grave surprise, "I parted with him not twenty minutes ago."

Mrs. Staunton flushed slightly; then, with the audacity of an adept, she recovered herself.

"So he told me, adding, poor fellow, that he had gone to meet you, with the self-avowed determination to ask you some very serious questions; had not found the occasion quite propitious, so had left you, but could not rest tonight without seeing you alone. I do not hesitate to speak of these little family matters before Monsieur Max, because he is quite one of us. I have appointed tomorrow for Monsieur Samuels's return."

Delphine's face was crimsoned up to the roots of her hair; she blushed for the knowledge that her mother had—

lied! But no words came from her in reply.

Max, watching her keenly, but furtively, saw the blush, and cursed the folly that had made him think this bright-browed girl could possibly come to love him; plain, grave, not young, when there was a "violet-eyed" suitor pleading for that dear little hand.

He would not return to the house; he already feared he should miss the train. He bade Delphine good-by there in the presence of her mother, leaving the child in tears; but the mother, radiant with victory.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. SAMUELS PRESCRIBES.

"It is medicine, not poison, I offer you."—*Lessing*.

"I will teach her the litany of moral truth. I will try to make her brave and strong." And right well had Eleanor Morgan kept the promise made to the dying lover of her youth. For in that trying period of her life, immediately succeeding the uprooting of the old ties, when the girl's heart was left bare and quivering, its lacerated fibres reaching out helplessly for new supports, but finding none, had it not been for the strong, pure, healthful principles of living inculcated by wise Eleanor, the new life must have gone much harder with her than it did.

When a resistless power lays low the stately edifice of a man's projected future out in the broad glare of the world's highway, innumerable hands beckon him on to a renewal of hope and endeavor. But when a woman's castle comes tumbling about her ears, walled in by propriety's prickly hedge, confined to the beaten path of "her sphere," the poor alternative of sullen submission or the substitution of the husks of contentment for the full ear of fruition, is all that lies before her.

Sullen submission was not consonant with Delphine's brightly-healthful mental constitution. Therefore, the husks of contentment must be her portion.

Max gone! Eleanor an object of fierce jealousy to her mother—that mother day by day giving herself up more completely to a slothful seclusion. The girl stood sadly alone. No one to share her daily life with; no one to whom she

could pour out all her budding theories and notions about people and things. She was at that age, when the mind is most dependant upon another and a stronger mind, just venturing upon flights into the realms of thought; poised timorously upon the verge of the known; leaning yearningly towards the shadowy regions of the unknown.

In such a case, what more natural than that the lonely girl should be seen almost daily seeking the enjoyable companionship of the parsonage? They were all good and kind to her there, and in the Rev. Mr. Samuels she was always sure to find a ready listener and an able adviser.

Her mother had told her that Mr. Samuels was to come again that day. Should he come, she would tell him of all her worries and perplexities.

Mrs. Staunton saw her daughter at the dinner-table for the first time on the day succeeding Mr. Morgan's departure.

"Mother, did I not understand you that you had appointed this morning for Mr Samuels to come here again?" asked Delphine, after dutifully and formally inquiring into the condition of her mother's nerves.

"This morning—Mr. Samuels—y-e-e-s—well, really, my dear child, I am not quite sure. When did I see your Monsieur of the violet-eyes? Come, help mamma to remember."

Not unfrequently did Delphine doubt her mother's complete restoration to sanity. Never, of her own wonderful patience.

"Did you not tell me when you called me in from the bayou that he had been here?"

"Did I? Possibly. I had to manufacture something on the spur of the moment, for the sake of your reputation."

"My reputation?" repeats the daughter, wonderingly.

"Yes, my poor ignorant child, your reputation. In France, where girls are raised as they should be, no young lady of any pretensions to gentility, could behave as you behave with that bold eyed Monsieur Max, and escape censure."

"Mother, stop! Put your strange hints into plain language. I am not good at guessing people's meaning."

"Mine needs no guessing. I did not think it proper for my daughter to be

alone with a young man, as you were with your Monsieur Max, and I called you to me."

She had opened a new page in the book of life before the pure eyes of the child.

"Not proper. I do not wonder at the close espionage you say your French girls are kept under. I fancy they must need it. But as for me, mother, don't make it too hard for me to treat you with proper respect."

A disagreeable laugh, full of scornful levity, grated harshly upon the girl's overwrought feelings. And this mocker was her mother!

"Child, you weary me with your heroics. Have done and learn to take life pleasantly. You will be old before your years of conquest arrive."

"But about Mr. Samuels?" says the persistent child.

"Ah! Bahl! Your Mr. Samuels, I know nothing about. I have not seen him. I hope not to see him."

"But mother, you said he had been here."

"Yes. Some excuse for calling you in I had to manufacture, and that was as good as another. There, I have no appetite left for my dinner, and one needs to bring the digestive apparatus of an ostrich to bear upon Mrs. Jeremiah's cookery."

Delphine waited no longer for the minister to keep the appointment he had never made. Immediately upon leaving the table, she whistled Blucher to her side, and set off for the parsonage.

"I knew I should find you all doing something or other. Do you ever stop being busy under this roof?"

"Indeed do we," answers the young pastor, placing a chair for her always-welcome self, near the table at which he was at work upon the dismembered mantel clock.

"I mean ever besides when you are asleep."

"I should dislike very much to keep count of all our idle moments. We would lose in our own estimation as well as in yours. But tell me what favor my little book found in your eyes."

"Oh!" A compunctious pair of eyes and remorsefully clasped hands supplement her not very satisfactory reply.

"Which means," says Mr. Samuels, "that the wrappings have not been ta-

ken off it yet. I suppose I ought to be angry." But his bright smile shows he is not.

"You would not be, if you knew how much I have had to distress me since you gave it to me."

"Distress. May not your friend and your pastor help you bear it?"

"Mr. Samuels," she says very suddenly, holding out to him her two little hands, "tell me what to do with these useless things?"

"Your gloves?" asked the young pastor, his glance travelling from the small hands, up to their moody-browed owner, with marked surprise in them.

"No; my two good-for-nothing hands. They are aside as those two clock-hands on the table corner."

"And like those same clock-hands just need a little regulating, to make them altogether indispensable within certain limits."

"That is just what I have come to you for."

"To be regulated?"

"Yes, to be regulated. Will you undertake the task?"

"I will undertake to assist you in the task."

"But I am afraid you will have to take my whole moral mechanism as completely apart as you have your mother's mantel clock. It must be put together wrong."

"I have no slur to cast upon the maker of my mantel-clock. It has been marred by clumsier hands."

"Then you are angry. I did not know my flippant simile conveyed any slur upon my maker. I did not mean that it should. Is that apology enough?"

"More than your words or myself demanded. But, do you really come to me for me to prescribe for idleness?"

"I really do."

"I have had some work cut out for you for a long time, waiting for this very moment."

"How did you know it would ever come?"

"I had good reason to believe it would, and you have not disappointed me. Thank you."

"For what, Mr. Samuels?"

"For being true to yourself."

"But where is my work?"

"Right at your own door."

"My door?"

"Yes. I want you to assist me in ame-

liorating the condition of your own slaves."

"Is there anything wrong in the place? There are but few. But I have always thought they were well treated in every respect. I shall inquire into it."

"They are excellently well treated in all but one respect."

"And that is?"

"Your total indifference to their moral welfare."

"Moral welfare," repeated the young mistress, slowly; the words seemed to have a queer sound about them. Red flannel shirts in winter and mosquito-bars in summer were *sine qua non*s where the physical welfare was concerned. But how should she go about taking care of their moral welfare.

"What can I do, Mr. Samuels?"

"You can visit them, read to them, instruct them."

"Visit them?"

"I think I would."

"But their cabins are so dirty."

"Your presence would be an inducement to greater cleanliness."

"And read to them? They are so stupid and ignorant they could not understand one word."

"All the more need for your instruction."

Delphine sat very quiet for a little while. This was not just the work those dainty hands would have chosen. She even doubted its being a wise undertaking. Mr. Samuels watched her very intently, as she sat there pondering his suggestion. He believed he knew how sore-pressed this young soul was. Believed that, to bring her entirely out of herself, suddenly and completely, into contemplating lots of greater hardship and sadder ordering than her own, would be wise and kind.

One of Delphine Staunton's greatest charms was that rare sweet humility which is sometimes united with the haughtiest pride. Where she trusted, she was as docile as a little child. She trusted this gentle browed young pastor believed that of such was the kingdom of Heaven; and after a short period of self-communing, she turned towards him her beautiful face radiant with high resolve.

"I will do as you want me. Tell me how to begin. I called my poor servants stupid and ignorant, when I am so terribly so myself."

"I will not tell you how to begin; I will begin with you. We will make the first visit together."

"You are always better than one dares hope you will be; you have taken all the terror away from it, and I thank you so sincerely."

Allowing herself just a margin of daylight for her homeward walk, she gave herself completely up to the gentle soothing influences that permeated the very atmosphere of the little parsonage.

Mr. Samuels followed up his suggestion very promptly, wisely fearing that the resolve born of enthusiasm, might weaken and die under chilling deliberation.

Saturday evening found him on his way to the homestead, well supplied with sundry brightly illumined cards, in which the decalogue displayed all the rain-bow tints.

"Are you ready?" he asks of Delphine as soon as she makes her appearance.

"Yes," she answers with a gasp, such as one might be pardoned with the dentist's chair in view, and then they leave the house on their mission.

"Yonders white folks comin'." The announcement speeds along the line of rolling, tumbling, greasy-faced, happy little darkeys, whose glistening teeth and white eye-balls are turned in pleased greeting towards 'Missy.'

"Let us stop at old Margery's first," Delphine suggests. "She is one of the old family servants, and disagreeable as I find it to enter the quarters, I have paid her several visits."

Gently disturbing with the tip of his cane an ill-mannered pig, who seemed disinclined to show "white folks" the civility of retreating before them, and rapping two yellow curs smartly over the head with the same useful article, Mr. Samuels finally cleared a way for Delphine into old Margery's cabin.

A stool and a hide-bottom chair were hastily wiped off, and placed in as clean a spot as could be commanded on such short notice, for "quality folks."

"How have you been, Aunt Margery, since your last attack? Any more rheumatism?"

"Now a little better'n, now a little worse, honey; thank de Lord for all his blessin's."

"You are still unable to leave the house, I suppose."

"Bless de Lam'! Yes, child, I doubten if this nigger'll ever see de blessed sun shinin' ag'in."

"Would you like me to come every day, to read to you awhile, Aunt Margery?"

"Read, child? Wha' for honey? Larnin's a good thing for such like's you an' de parson yer; but for this ole nigger, Bless God, chile, a plug'er t'bacc'er'd do me sight more good."

"But you might have the tobacco and the reading, too, Margery," Mr. Samuels suggests.

"Yas, sir; yas, Mars Parson, I'se not say nothin' ag'in your books. Bless de Lam', I'se willin' to listen as long as Missy yon'er's ready to read. But when I feels like nothin' more'n a bundle of aches, seems like a good chaw t'bacc'er's mighty soothin' like."

"I will bring you some the next time I come. And now I want to leave you something pretty to look at."

Delphine slips from the big envelope on her lap a gaily illumined card, which warns Margery in golden letters that she "shalt not steal."

"Please God, that's purty, sho!" Margery says, holding out her rheumatic hand with child-like eagerness, for the "purty pickcher."

"And it has a meaning, Aunt Margery." Then the pretty lay minister, blushing a little (because, although he has kindly gone out to the door, where the little darkeys, and the pigs, and the yellow curs, are all tumbling over each other in democratic enjoyment of dirt and equality, she feels sure that the real minister will not lose a word of this, her maiden effort), explains the gilt lettering, and with it for a text, preaches a very creditable extempore sermon.

Old Margery listens in rapt attention, interpolating the missionary's remarks with a mumbling succession of "Yes, Lord! Bless de Lam'! Sweet Jesus!" much to the confusion of the novice, who felt a wicked desire to laugh at Margery herself and the real minister.

"And now, Margery, I am going to hang this just here, over your mantel-piece, where you can look up at it all the time, and not forget what the card says."

"To be sure, chile."

Delphine tip-toes to attain her object, and from her upreaching hands, her fresh white handkerchief slips unno-

ticed, and flutters to chair-ridden Margery's feet.

"Tell me ag'in, chile, jis what the good card says;" and Margery struggles to her feet, with the aid of her cane, to stand close by Delphine's side.

"Thou shalt not steal," says the young lady very solemnly. "You must remember the words, and teach them to your children and your grand-children, Aunt Margery."

"Bless de Lam'! Yes, honey."

"And tell them that a long time ago God came down from Heaven on purpose to give that command, together with nine other ones, to people here on earth."

"I wonder."

"And that he is very, very angry when people forget his commandments."

"Sweet Jesus! yes, honey."

"Now I must be going. I shall come every Saturday evening, Aunt Margery, and bring my Bible with me."

"And de t'bacc'er, dear honey, don't forget that. This old nigger's in rale need of some, sartin, sho."

Then Delphine joins Mr. Samuels without, and they pick their way to the next cabin.

"As they disappear from view, Margery hobbles a step or two backwards to her chair, stoops quickly, and possesses herself of the dainty cambric handkerchief dropped by the lay preacher.

"Purty, sho! Got any name?" deftly the black fingers travel round the snowy hem-stitched border. "Good luck, no—hi, Mag, you'se in luck today! This nigger can hole up her head, now, wid de bes of 'em at the nex' funeral," with which Delphine's white handkerchief disappears within some mysterious receptacle under her chair seat.

"'Dow shilt not steal! Them's good words, an' de nex' time I catch that good-fur nothin', triflin' houn', Bob, in my 'tater patch, I'll fotch him in yer, an' see ef I can't shame some sense inter 'im."

In the course of another hour or two Mr. Samuels and his assistant had paid a short visit to each cabin, and ornamented each mantel-shelf with one of their cards; had lectured a wife-beater on cruelty; delivered themselves of various and sundry exhortations to cleanliness; and turned them about to return to the house.

"I have never shown you my new

path, have I?" asked Delphine, brightening up at the prospect of leaving behind her her uninviting field of labor. "Let us go back to the house by it. I did not know the old place could boast such a pretty nook."

Nothing loath, Mr. Samuels followed her lead, and soon found himself in an entirely unfamiliar portion of the forest which surrounded the homestead.

Side by side, the two walked along the wooded path, the girl feeling fresher, for the bare effort at usefulness; the minister placidly happy, because she was there by his side.

"Well, does your new work promise any attraction?"

"It promises distraction, which is what I most need and desire."

"May I not—"

"Hush!" With uplifted hand Delphine motions him to silence. Voices, as of two persons conversing in carefully modulated tones are plainly heard. "I thought this path was all my own. I resent its discovery and use by others. I wonder who these intruders can be?" she says almost in a whisper to her companion.

"We shall soon know."

Half a dozen more steps and they stood in the presence of Mrs. Staunton and M. Emile Girardeau, seated side by side upon a fallen log; and so intent was the young man in listening to the earnest but rapid harangue of the lady, that Delphine's icy "Mother!" was the first intimation they had of an interruption.

"You bad girl! I spend half my time wandering about, hunting you up. Mrs. Staunton rallies quickly from the evident confusion her daughter's appearance has thrown her into.

"I am sorry you should have been so inconvenienced." With a haughty bow to M. Girardeau, she waits for her mother to join herself and Mr. Samuels on their return walk.

When the minister leaves her for the evening he wishes he dared put into words of some sort his yearning desire to comfort her. But she has withdrawn into herself, since that meeting with her mother, and is so haughtily cold and repellant, that he dares only venture upon a fervent "God bless you," while holding one of those useless but "pretty little hands."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RECORD OF A WEEK.

"I have heard of reasons manifold
Why love must needs be blind,
But this the best of all I hold—
His eyes are in his mind."

—*Southey*

"A diary, Max! Not one of those stupidly conscientious records of how often one has gotten up in the morning, and washed one's face and eaten one's breakfast, which you and I used to laugh to scorn. I am sending you simply an account of my daily doings, because you have written me that the most uneventful matter relating to my welfare will be of interest to you, and I know you are sincere in all your utterances."

"At one setting and upon a very small piece of paper, I could easily tell you everything, but it is pleasant to feel one's self constantly en rapport with those one loves; so, in spite of the poor opinion we both entertain of young ladies' diaries, you will have to wade through one every week of two."

("There, now, I will never receive the credit due me, for that brave beginning. But why should I burden him with troubles he is utterly powerless to lighten? Dear Max, it will please him to think I am cheerful and contented,") whereupon, the brave diarist recorded her:

"Monday—After all my sneers I cannot see that I have much to record outside the getting up, face-washing, and breakfast-eating achievements. Walked over to the parsonage in the evening, from there to the church, to take an organ lesson from Mr. Samuels, (he plays beautifully.)"

"Tuesday—I open my diary (which is nothing in the world, Max, but the identical sheet of fool's-cap you are looking at this minute), with more pleasure than usual, for something has been kind enough to happen. My uncle, Father Richards, arrived here yesterday. He is to spend several days with us. I adore him! He is so stately, so learned, so gentle, and talks to one about one oneself, and one's tiniest worries, with such bewitching kindness and fascinating earnestness, that I no longer wonder at the influence these holy men wield. My mother has been a different woman ever since his arrival. No devotee was ever more zealously awake to her religious duties. Surely, the church which can mould such men as my uncle Richards; the religion which can stir such sluggish natures as my mother's to ardent devotion; the belief which can reconcile lonely men and

women to long lives of utter self-abnegation and beautiful usefulness, must be the one true, vital church. I am so tired, Max, of churches one has to take care of; I want a church that will take care of me. I love to hear my uncle tell me of the lives of the gentle sisters and nuns. I wonder if I am too wicked to ever make one. Who would care? Who would miss me, if I buried myself alive, and was resurrected in one of those stiff, white scoops under the name of Sister Agatha, or sister something-or-other-else?" (There, my Tuesday is trenching on dangerous ground. No one talks about nunneries and that sort of thing, when they are making believe to be very, very happy.)

"Wednesday—Nothing new. Uncle Richards still here, although Mother Danbury has done her very best to disgust him with this locality. Nothing can induce that sincere Christian, but small-souled Protestant, that a Catholic priest ever does, or ever should, enjoy any of this world's cheer. She has fed us on fish since he has been staying with us, until I absolutely feel finny. Poor Dan! She has kept him going with his basket and rods until he told her despairingly that he really believed he had exhausted the supply in the bayou, and now she has fallen back on mackerel and salt herring. It is awful. I honestly think I could swim without a shadow of fear or difficulty."

"Mr. Samuels and Lucy walked over this evening. It was well worth sitting quietly by, while two such men as my uncle Richards and our gentle 'St. Paul' discussed dogmas with a rare freedom from dogmatism."

"After all, I believe the church which moulded Mr. Samuels, so wise, so gentle, so full of Christian charity, must do its work well, too."

"Thursday—Did nothing all day, by reason of a bad headache in the morning, a bad temper at noon, and a bad fit of the sulks all evening. Father Richards leaves for Wickam tomorrow. I shall avail myself of his escort, to pay dear Nonee and Evy a visit. Have not seen my dear parsonage friends today."

"Saturday night—(a hiatus, which is something orderly young persons never admit into their diaries) I am back from Wickam. Do you ask me if I had a pleasant visit? I say no! Do you ask if I am sorry I went? I say no again. Do you ask if I am not in a somewhat unreasonable way? Still, I say no, as persistently and monotonously as that stupid child, who could say nothing but we are seven to every interrogatory."

"My visit was bitter-sweet, sorrowfully-glad, pleasurable-painful, or anything else paradoxical you may choose to imagine."

"I missed someone at every turn. I missed you most sadly of all, dear Max. Was it your presence that used make the rooms look

larger and aliter and brighter than they did yesterday? Was it your being there that made the garden-walks, and the flower-beds, and the climbers, all look like bits of Eden's unappreciated garden? How else explain the disappointing feeling at every turn? The garden-walks were so much gravel and 'stars of Bethlehem,' nothing more. The flower-beds were full of thorny roses and bold-eyed dahlias; the climbers clambered in ungraceful fashion, as if they, too, missed a certain strong kindly hand, always ready to help the weak, to guide the erring. Maybe, after all, things looked poorer and smaller and meaner, because I have grown older. I have heard old people talk of how things narrowed, as the moral vision expanded, which makes me sorry to think I shall ever grow old or expand morally."

"I missed my gallant Cousin Paul. I have always thought that dashing cousin of mine was born in the wrong era. He belongs to the age of chivalry, where his gay courage, his gently courtesey, his irrepressible manliness, would have had fuller scope and appreciation. I think he would look so very much more in place in one of the Waverly Novels, than in Wickam."

"But he no longer belongs to Wickam. I found Aunt Catherine and Uncle Weyland alone, and though they carry it bravely, the loneliness hurts them (as who does it not, Max.) When I asked for Paul, Uncle Weyland, answering jocularly (he was never known to answer any other way), said that Wickam had grown too small for Paul, or Paul too large for Wickam; he was not quite certain which, and that he had left the parent-nest on half-fledged wings, to try broader fields. But the boy is right; if a young man wants to succeed, he must get him away from his birth-place, where he will never be anything but 'that boy' to such scores of people who have 'dandled him on their knees,' that the fact of his having ever acquired the accomplishment of walking becomes matter of marvel."

"And I missed poor Cousin Gus (why is it no adjective but 'poor' ever suggests itself in connection with certain people), not that he was so inaccessible, for I did see him in the evening at home—I mean at your house. But he has become a wonderful business man. They say Mr. Lonsdale entertains the best opinion of him, and holds out promises of preferment, which will be of immense benefit to him. Aunt Maria looks happier, owing, I suppose, to the great and marked improvement in Gus. Susie is getting a sour look about her, and a tart way with her, not pleasant to behold. I wonder does the milk of human kindness ever turn to bonny-clabber? Mr. Samuels over this evening."

Sunday—Max, my Sundays are all spoiled now-a-days. They would be perfect if I

walk quietly through the woods to listen to one of Mr. Samuels's short, terse sermons, and back home, to do just as he pleased with the balance of the day. But he cannot do."

It is but natural that my mother should find great pleasure in M. Girardeau's society, and that she should bring them from the same country, and that she should be in their nationality. But she has a great fancy to have him on Sundays, until it has almost become a matter of course. You have never yet seen 'my man,' as they all persist in calling him. He is a most remarkably changed man. Where he was sentimentally inclined, I should think he was pinning away under some great attachment. That some great and burdensome oppression seems very plain. Samuels, with his ever quick sympathy, has been very kind indeed to him, and cannot comfort no mortal can. I suppose very wicked not to feel glad that he has any solace in my mother's company. At the same time, I do not like to see him. And that is the way my Sundays are led now-a-days."

To-morrow, I shall seal and despatch. I wonder if he remembers the sermon I preached me upon useless repining? You never know, Max, how hard I have tried to write down one or two wails. I am progressing rapidly in the noble expression."

Did he remember his sermon upon useless repining? I doubt it. For he pored hungrily over this week's issue of Delphine's, noting carefully the tightness of the wording, the absence of all girlish petulance, the serene, the written record, proved strange enough, so many irritants.

He has grown reconciled to the new sickness. The new hopes and new are springing up luxuriantly. Day by day's record, omits the "violent minister." "Well, I repeat it. I am glad, or, to confine myself strictly to veracity, I ought to be

But—bah! I begin to doubt of its curative properties and my own sense."

With all his getting, Mr. Morgan has not gotten wisdom. Else, he would have drawn the largest amount of common sense from the very freedom with which the minister handled the minister's name.

At thirty (according to Young), he only suspects himself a fool—knows forty—therefore, Max, strong, clear-headed, reasonable in all matters but love for this "Queen of Hearts," he has granted several years of grace."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CRISIS IN TWO LIVES.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or knows his deserts small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all."

—Montrose.

Mr. Timothy Lonsdale, banker, awoke one morning to find himself robbed! Not caring to find himself famous, also (for after all, what is fame but a fine name for notoriety?) he kept his trouble to himself; no one beside the watchman of the bank being aware until after closing hours that the big safe in the banker's private office had been tampered with.

When, as Mr. Ames, Jr., was drawing on his gloves, in preparation for his homeward walk, the watchman brought him a message from his employer.

"Mr. Lonsdale would like to see Mr. Ames in his private office."

Augustus replaced his hat and gloves and followed the messenger into the banker's own apartment, the green baize door of which swung noiselessly to, shutting the three men within walls which had no ears.

Mr. Lonsdale was sitting at his desk, upon the lid of which was scattered in a confusion only equaled by the frenzied disorder of his short-cut gray hair, heaps of papers, to which he was rapidly adding still other heaps, dragged out from their long repose in the recesses of the iron safe, standing open at his elbow.

He turned a face full of anxiety on Augustus as he came and stood near him.

"Ames, I have been robbed!"

"Robbed, sir?"

"Robbed."

"The vault? I thought it impregnable."

"Not the vault, the safe. Money gone—Mrs. Lonsdale's jewels and still more valuable papers."

Augustus expressed his surprise and distress, then waited anxiously to hear why he had been selected for the master's confidence on this occasion."

Mr. Lonsdale turned abruptly upon the watchman.

"Tell Mr. Ames all you know about this matter."

"Yes, sir. You know, Mr. Ames, what a sharp creature for a bark my little terrier 'Vizen' is. I always keeps her

here with me at night, so that when I'm a watchin' round about the vault way, she can keep guard over this room and the safe. What could agot into the creature last night, beats my time. I left her here jus' as usual, when I was goin' my rounds—was gone maybe something like half an hour—come back leisurelike, allowing that 'twas all right inside; being, you see, Vixen had made no noise, when, please God, as I opened that door, the very door you and me came through just now (you know it opens very easy like), right here, kneelin' down, jus' so, the safe open an' a dark lantern throwin' its light inside of it, was a man, so busy like over his rascally stealin' that he never heard me come in. Drawin' quick and cockin' my pistol in less time by a jugful than its took to tell you all this, I was just about to give it to him, when, without leave or license, he gave one big bound and was up in the open window. I blazed away at him anyway, and give him the best in the shop; then I jumped to the window, but if witches had switched him out of sight on broomsticks, he couldn't 'a cleared himself no quicker.

"Where was Vixen all that time?"

"Blast her! Layin' under the master's big leather chair, as quiet as if it'd been one of the bank folks themselves, about their own lawful business."

"How do you account for her behavior?"

"I don't undertake to account for it at all, sir. It's a plaguy strange business all round," answered the watchman, scratching his head viciously, as perplexed people are prone to do when their heads prove unequal to the occasion.

"You may go now, John. I will discuss this matter further with Mr. Ames. But remember, sir, that your continuance in your present place depends upon your complete silence in this matter. One word to anyone outside of this room, and you will look for another employer."

"I'll remember, sir;" with which John was gone and Augustus alone with the banker.

"And now, Mr. Ames, you are wondering, perhaps, what you have to do with this matter."

Augustus acknowledged his anxiety.

"I am depending upon you, sir, to discover the thief, and restore my property."

"I, Mr. Lonsdale? I detect the thief? Why, I would not know how to start about it even. Why not put it in the hands of the proper police authorities?"

"Because this matter *must not become public*."

"And why? Since you have honored me with your confidence, sir, I presume I may ask that question."

"I told you that my greatest loss was a box of valuable papers."

"Yes, sir."

"They were papers relating altogether to family matters."

"Then whom could they benefit?"

"But one person alive."

"And that one person?"

"My own nephew."

"Percy Lonsdale! Our gentlemanly cashier!"

"So I fear. And this is why, Ames, that this matter must be handled with gloves."

"But the grounds for your suspicions? The whole thing sounds so monstrous to me."

"And it is monstrous. I have cared for that boy as for my own child. But he comes of a bad stock, Ames—a bad stock by the mother's side. The grounds for my suspicion are these. Those papers would benefit no one but Percy. No one but he was aware of their being in that safe. Yesterday, only, he requested and obtained ten days leave of absence to visit a married sister in Simsport. The dog's remarkable quietness points to the fact that she knew the thief was some one who belonged about the premises. Percy has left town. Find out for me who has robbed me, Ames, above all things, recover that box of papers and a junior partnership in the bank is yours!"

Vision of a junior partnership, which meant position, ease, Lucy, happiness, passed before Augustus's eyes in a bright-hued panorama. He was silent from very excess of gratitude.

"You hesitate. You are right. Always consider well every proposition made you. There is both difficulty and danger in the undertaking. You are entirely at liberty to refuse, if you wish to."

"I was not silent from hesitation. Your offer suggested a train of thought irrelevant to our business. I will undertake this thing, not promising success, for I will be trying but a 'prentice hand

at the detective business, but promising to leave undone nothing which ought to insure success."

"Thank you. The contents of this pocket-book I think you will find ample for your travelling expenses. If not, write to me for more."

"Have you any especial directions for my guidance, sir?"

"None, my boy. I trust you; you are a gentleman. You will be discreet. My nephew left Wickam to visit his married sister, Mrs. Dangerfield, of Simsport. Good-by and God bless you," The banker dismissed him with a cordial clasp of the hand, and Augustus turned himself homeward, to find his mother alert and anxious at his unusual tardiness.

That Mr. Lonsdale was sending him away on important business connected with the bank, was all that he considered it necessary to impart to his family.

Mrs. Ames prepared his small valise with as much care and attention to her boy's wants as if he were about to cross the briny ocean for a year's absence.

The first train which left Wickam after Mr. Lonsdale's interview with Augustus, left it with that young gentleman aboard in the novel character of an amateur detective.

Simsport was not his immediate destination. In the few hours he had had for contemplating the subject of his errand, it had occurred to him that legal advice as to his own course in the matter was almost necessary to his success. But the whole affair was to be conducted with so much secrecy that to obtain such advice was in itself a point for very delicate action.

He would stop over and see Paul, and consult him confidentially. The "old fellow" was fast making a name.

He felt quite sure he should find him equal to giving the advice he was in need of.

The meeting between the cousins was full of happy cordiality. There was so much to tell of touching their new lives—so much to ask about touching the old. Then Augustus comes to the business which has brought about this pleasant meeting, pledging Paul first to the secrecy of the confessional.

Business discussed and disposed of with a happy facility which belongs only to the arrogant years of early manhood. Paul, in his turn, pledges Augustus to the secrecy of the confession, and divulges that

early on the morrow he is to leave his law office for a few days to go down to the Lodge for convenience sake only.

"The truth is," says the Judge's son, "I think I have a right now to ask the girl I love some very searching questions, and to have them answered, too."

"The girl you love," says Augustus, feeling sick and faint. What chance would he have if Paul should go back there with his handsome face and his winning voice and his budding fame? Then he thought of the package of gently kind letters he was carrying along with him, and took heart of grace."

"Yes," Paul resumes, "I believe we were all rather soft about that time on Miss Samuels. You and Girardeau and I. But I've seen no one yet to compare with her. And, as I don't care to remain dangling any longer between Heaven and earth, I am going down to put the matter to the test, and win or lose it all. I hope, before I return, to get things in trim."

"In trim? You are not engaged to Lucy Samuels, are you, Paul?"

"No; but that is just what I want to become."

"Have you ever spoken to her on the subject?"

"On what subject?"

"Of your love."

"In hints and sighs, and spooney insinuations, yes. Scores of times just nearing the subject close enough to find out that I was not absolutely obnoxious to her. Upon which I have rested contented, until I could go to her like a man, and tell her I was ready to support her comfortably, if she would be my wife."

"And you are going to her to say that now?"

"I am, as fast as steam can carry me."

Then Augustus asked no more questions. It was hard, just as the chance of the bank partnership was offered him, and he, too, was looking forward to the near prospect of going to Lucy like a man, to tell her that he was ready to support her comfortably, if she would be his wife, to have Paul step in before him, and carry off the prize; the hope of winning which had been his inspiration now for so many months of heroic self-control and praiseworthy effort. And yet, how could he reconcile his duty to his employer, with his longing to turn aside and have his own fate decided by this yellow-haired arbiter? Twenty-four

hours could surely make no great difference in Mr. Lonsdale's business, and might alter a life for him. He would go with Paul. He would not tell him why, for this girl-worship of his shunned the light; it was sacred—too nearly akin to a religion to be gossiped about, even with Paul. She did not belong to Paul yet. He had a right to adore her, to kneel to her, to plead for the blessing of her love, and he would do it, too. Poor heart, how little of its fancied security could he call to his aid, in the presence of that splendid cousin. What would the bank partnership be to him, if Lucy said "no" to him, and "yes" to Paul? What would life itself be with his inspiration gone? When he spoke again his voice sounded troubled.

"Paul, I believe I will go as far as the Homestead with you. My business cannot suffer by the delay of twenty-four hours."

"Why not to the Lodge? We will reach the Lodge by dinner tomorrow, and then ride over in the evening to the Homestead; spend the night with our kin, and the next day—well, who knows what the next day may hold in store for us?"

"Who, indeed, but One who holds our fates in the hollow of his hand," Augustus replies, with a solemnity at which he smiles himself presently.

CHAPTER XXX.

AUGUSTUS AMES MAKES HIS MARK.

"Ye gods, it doth amaze me,
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world,
And bear the palm alone."

—Shakespeare.

When Augustus Ames rode out through the Lodge gates, late the next evening, side by side with Paul, who sat his prancing gray with the easy grace of a lusty young centaur, his eyes rested upon him admiringly, but sadly. There was not a shadow of bitterness or of envy in his heart against this gallant cousin of his. Only the wings of the hope upon which he had been soaring so surely, so loftily, drooped heavily.

Paul had always been on the winning side. What hope was there that his faithful ally, "good luck," would fail him now?

Mrs. Staunton, Delphine, Emile Girard,

deau, Mr. Samuels, all came under friendly discussion as they rode slowly along by the hedges that flung their crimson-berried arms far out to meet them, by the long rows of white-washed cabins, from whose chimneys curled the blue smoke, that hinted of suppers in the course of preparation, by the homeward bound teams, heaped high with snowy banks of cotton; then into the shadows and the darkness and the gloom of the woodland; *her* name only was not spoken.

Gradually, as the shades thickened, they grew more silent, until a spell of dumbness seized upon them both.

"Hush!" It is Paul who draws rein suddenly, and commands silence when no man speaketh.

As motionless as two equestrian statues they remain until it comes again.

A low, prolonged, quivering groan of mortal anguish!

"It is over there to the right, ahead of us," and Paul spurs forward.

"It is here, just at hand; wait!"

It comes again, lower, more tremulous, less prolonged, a feeble wail from suffering humanity. Following the sound until the faint glisten of water told them that they were close upon the bayou's banks, the cousins dismounted hastily, tethered their horses to a tree, and groped their way forward through the briery undergrowth.

"There! I see him! It is a man! God for a light!" and Augustus, closely followed by Paul, stood over the prostrate form of a man, lying near by the water's edge, a battered tin cup clinched in his hand, showing how he had vainly striven to reach out for the water, running so close by his helpless, craving lips.

For a moment the groans ceased, then a voice, hoarse from suffering, asks: "Is it you, boys?"

"It is some one to help you, if you will tell us how you are hurt, that we may know what to do first," Augustus says, taking the lead of Paul for the first time in a life-time. "Who are you?"

"A dying man!"

"No, don't think it. We have come to help you. Tell us how you are injured, so that we may know what to be about."

"It's no go. I know by your voices you're young, by your wordin' you're gentlemen. You're in danger here, best leave. There's nothin' you

kin do for me. I'm about to hand in my checks, and if the parsons are right, a thunderin' reckonin's awaitin' for me. But I'll do one good turn to my fellerman before I do go, and that's to warn you young chaps out of these woods. It ain't safe. If my pals should happen back right now, 'twouldn't be good for your wholesome. There, I've warned you. It's the first half-way good thing I've done in a score of evil years. I wonder if they'll scratch out one of the black marks again' me up yonder in the big book?" The excitement of feverish delirium sounded in his voice. For a while his physical sufferings had lulled. Then with a shudder and a groan the poor wretch writhed within its returning throes.

"Paul! Surely you have matches; a light we must have!"

Gathering together a heap of leaves and sticks, while Paul searched his pockets for a match, the first faint flicker of a blaze was struggling into existence, when a heavy hand was flung on the heap, and once more they were enveloped in total darkness.

"Fools!" gasped the prostrate man. "By the God I used to pray to, you shan't be lightin' the boys this way. I'm not just where they left me, for I thought I'd die for a drink of cold water, and I've drug myself many a yard to get to this water; but they'll find me; there's honor 'mong thieves, and the boys will come back for me. We never forsakes our pals in trouble. Ef it'd been their luck, 'stead of mine, to be shot by that cursed watchman, I'd a stuck to 'em, by God, I'd a stuck to 'em, and they'll stick to me."

"Where are your friends?"

"Out yonder in the woods a-burying of the cursed shinin' stones and the tin box, that looks now like mighty poor pay for a bullet-hole."

"The bank 'box!" Augustus hisses the word into Paul's ear, fastening a savage grip on his coat lappel.

"What can we do? Only two of us, and there may be a dozen of them," Paul whispers back.

Augustus stoops once more to the wounded burglar.

"We wish to help you. Have you friends enough out yonder in the woods to carry a litter to the next house? We cannot leave you out here to die."

"Go. The boys'll take care of me.

They'll come back. They're only two, but they are strong and true. Get away from here, I tell you. You're young, both of you. Most likes you've got mothers to love you, and cry over you. I had one myself once, but I broke her heart and sent her to Heaven, where there's small chance of my ever gettin' to see her agin. But I tell you to go! I'm usin' about the last breath in a good-for-nothin' body, to tell you to go." Once more groans of mortal agony impeded his utterance.

"There are but two out yonder! Mount your horse and gallop for help. They must be secured," Augustus's voice sounds stern and commanding, as he gives Paul his orders in a rapid undertone.

"And leave you here alone?"

"Gods! Why waste time talking?" with fierce impatience; "yes, you have heard him say they will have to search for him; there is plenty of time. Go! My own fate is wavering in the balance."

"You go, Gus, and let me watch."

"Paul! You are snatching fortune from my grasp. You know these woods; I do not. You are a better rider and have a better horse. Go! If you have one particle of affection for me, do as I bid you for this once. I must stay to treasure up every scrap of evidence that falls from his lips."

"I'll go, then, and God grant I am doing the right thing, and take care of you."

The clattering of his horse's hoofs aroused the wounded man once more.

"They're gone! Thank mother's God for that much."

"One of us is gone," said Augustus, kneeling down by his side, "the other will remain until help comes, so that you can be removed."

"One still here? Young man, does it happen you are a parson?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You hold your life so light, you ought to be. Is there nothing very dear to you that you'd like to look upon again?"

Augustus shuddered. "Yes, many. One dearer than all the rest, who would never forgive me if I deserted a dying man."

"A sweetheart? I had one once—my Jenny! And I loved her too—but she turned ag'in me, when I started."

hill, and I went all the faster to the dogs for her turnin'. If women would be patient, men might be wiser. Now, get away to your sweetheart, or the boys will be back presently to make her heart ache."

"Why should they injure me?"

"Poor young fool! You're on their track, and you can't live."

"I shall not leave you," said Augustus, firmly."

A silence, broken only by the heavy, labored breathing of the burglar and the restless motion of Augustus's horse tethered there to the tree, followed his bravely-spoken determination.

Then the burglar waked up to consciousness only one time more.

"I have been dreaming. Happy dreams; the pain's all gone."

"You are better?"

"No, I am worse. I'll die, I'm thinking, before the boys gets through buryin' the box, and they'll have another buryin' to get through with in the darkness here. Young man, I kinder wish you was a parson, or a priest, or one of those good folks that undertake to insure you the next world, for a few honest words spoken at the last gasp in this."

"My poor man, speak your honest words, and I, a minister's son, may be able to comfort you with the promises that are held out to penitiant sinners."

"Might you know how to pray for a dying sinner. I've forgot all the words I learned of poor old mother, and somehow, I feel right now as if—if the Angel Gabriel were to come and ask me (even if I was strong and well again as the boys out yonder) if I'd take them diamonds we stole from old Lonsdale's bank, or the good words mother used to teach, I'd say give me the good words, they're the true diamonds after all. The rest's nothing but shining glass. But there, I've peached on the boys—I never thought to sink that low—its time I was pegging out—I've grown too mean for a honest rogue even."

Bending eagerly over the stalwart form, so full, in such apparent vigor, that it was almost impossible to believe life was fast ebbing out of it, Augustus treasured up every word that fell from the dying sinner's lips. If he could only get some clue to the burying spot of the bank-box! Or if Paul would only get *back with help*. God, how long he

A crashing of heavy foot-falls in the under-bush! Help had come.

"Paul!" Clear, welcoming, glad, the voice rang out upon the darkness.

"Paul! Who in hell have we here?"

A voice harsh, mocking, ruffianly, answered Augustus's call for his cousin, and a dark lantern suddenly flashed its light full upon him, as he stood there over the wounded man.

"The burglars!" For a moment, he cowered in actual fear, repenting him of the foolhardiness that had drawn him into this danger. He glanced towards his horse; the men were between it and him. "Paul! Paul! Oh God! I would not have tarried so if you were in this extremity," he moaned almost audibly; then, with one heroic effort, he shook off his terror to find the ruffians eyeing him with a diabolical coolness that once more froze the warm pulses of his heart.

"He's gone!" said the elder of the two remaining thieves, touching with his coarse boot, the body of the burglar, who had gone to his last sleep without a sigh or a struggle, "Did he peach on us?"

"Peach on you?" Augustus repeated the words in ignorant wonder.

"Yes, by God! Peach on us—don't fool, or you'll be of no more account than Joe's burly carcass here, before you're ten minutes older."

"I do not know what you mean."

"Did he tell tales, then; damn him, and you too!"

"He told me that he was one of the bank robbers—told me that his companions had gone off to bury their plunder, and begged me to leave him; which I would not do."

"More fool you. But, as we're gentlemen as always pays our way, we'll give you one chance for your life, to square accounts for being kind to him that's gone."

Hope bounded full-pulsed into Augustus's fainting soul. He was young, life was sweet and Lucy was dear!

"Yer say Joe got soft life towards the last, as they all do when judgment day's 'bout to break, and tole tales out of school, hey?"

"He was decidedly repentant."

"Do you lie when you say he told you no more than that we was hidin' the plunder?"

"I do not lie. He told me no more."

"Poor old Joe. He was a good one for biz, though. Dama the box that cost him his life—their welcome to it, who may find it;" and with a swing, the ruffian sent the fatal box, to recover which, Augustus Ames had dared too much, rolling to his feet.

He stooped eagerly and secured it.

"Now, young chap, for you. You're young and you've got a smooth chin yet; we don't war on boys. We're gentlemen of honor, that supports ourselves by occasionally reliev'in' them as is got more'n their share of spondulx. Accordin' to your own showin' you don't know no dangerous deal after all. Five minutes' time we'll give you to make up your mind in, whether or no you'll hold your jaw about what you do know. Say you will, and there's your horse and there's your road. Say no, and you'll put us to the trouble of diggin' a hole biz enough to 'commodate you and poor old Joe at oncet. In the meantime, we'll have to trouble you for the watch I'm purty sho is dangling on to the end of that fancy chain, to count your five minutes by. We're gentlemen of honor, an' we don't keer to cheat you out o' one second av your allotted time."

Mechanically, feeling already as if he were done with life, Augustus Ames unwound the gold chain from about his neck.

"Take it, Bill, and kneel down by the lantern."

"Kneelin's not much in my line," Bill answers, with a ruffianly oath against the thorny carpet upon which he kneels to bring the open watch close to the lantern's face.

In a dream, a horrible, terrible dream, Augustus, palid, with lips tight clenched, his black hair thrown backward from his clammy forehead, his large mournful eyes fixed with incredulous horror on the kneeling ruffian, took the whole awful truth in.

He had thrown away his life to win—what? A poor partnership in a perishable bank—a girl who loved another!

"One minute gone!"

No, it was cowardice that made things look so. Paul would be here in a minute with help. He could not be longer than another minute away! He had been gone a lifetime already!

"Two!"

With folded arms he turned his gaze

downward upon the ruffian kneeling there, holding the gold watch close to the lantern's eye. It was a coarse, pitiless face—no appeal to his mercy would avail. Then upon the features of his companion the minister's son turned his wistful gaze. God help him when those five minutes should expire, for there was no help in man.

"Three!"

Should he promise silence and let them go? Was he called on to dare more—to risk more? A heavy sigh falls upon his agonized ear. He turns; it's only Molly, Paul's pretty mare, tethered there to the tree. Her great, calm eyes gleam upon him by the lantern's glare with a wistfulness in them that looks like pity. She sighs for her own liberation not for his extremity!

"Four!"

Hope dies! Paul has deserted him. Lucy will never know that he was lord of himself in this, the supremest agony of his life. Paul will win her.

"Boy, are you mad? Promise!"

"I!" He bends his head. Hope, deliverance, life! The sound of clattering hoofs! Nearer, nearer! Faster, faster!

"Paul!"

"Five! By God, die then!"

Paul has come, but come too late! Help is at hand. Augustus needs it."

Lights flash through the sombre woods as a madly-excited, pursuing party dash after the fleeing burglars, leaving only Paul and Mr. Samuels bending heart-broken over the minister's dying son. "One minute sooner, and all would have been well," he sighed, then closed his dim eyes upon the world and all its cheats.

Paul has the fast stiffening form clasped close to his bursting heart.

"Gus, dear Gus! God, why did I go at your bidding? Speak to me once more, cousin! Say something to me, my boy. Something that I can carry to poor Aunt Maria. It's going to kill her, Gus, to have you leave her this way. Open your eyes just once more. Just think you're not hurt, and maybe you'll rally."

The dark eyes opened, so large, so dim, so mournful, that Paul knew the end must be nigh.

Tenderly clasping the clay-cold hands within his own, the Rev. Mr. Samuels's lips moved in silent prayer.

"Paul, tell mother!—tell mother—" faint, gentle, powerless, the voice dies away.

"Augustus, say it after me; it will comfort that dear mother." The minister bent in lowly pity over the dying boy, his own voice trembling from excess of emotion: "I know."

"I know," the dying voice repeats, gently, docilely, "that my"—

"That my"—

"Redeemer liveth!"

For one great, final effort worsted nature gathers together her scattered forces, the eyes of the dying man opened fearlessly, his voice expends its last strength in obedience to Lucy's brother.

"I do know that my Redeemer liveth! Lucy, my fair-haired queen, my gentle redeemer from the old life of evil and uselessness. God bless her and you too, Paul! You are still on the winning side, cousin. Tell mother I was not afraid to die! Tell Lucy I was lord of myself. Tell father—tell father—I am sorry for him!"

And that was all. The eyes closed wearily, and Augustus Ames lay dead in his cousin's arms.

The morning dawned gray and chill, and when the new day pierced its way through the thick, matted branches of the trees about the spot where he had met his fate, there was nothing there to tell how a man can die, save a few trampled bushes, a dying heap of ashes and a fatal bank-box, for which a fresh, young life had been rashly thrown away.

But he had "made his mark!"—a mark that neither time nor change could ever efface, then soared

"Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
Which men call earth."

CHAPTER XXXI.

STRICKEN HEARTS.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto
my sorrow."

The messenger of evil tidings has but a losing office; a fact which was brought home to Mr. Samuels, when he consented, at Paul Weyland's earnest solicitation, to assume the painful duty of "breaking" the sad tidings to his brother minister of Wickam.

"Breaking the sad tidings!" As

though the mills of the gods, which grind slowly, but grind exceeding small, might not reduce each anguish-burdened word to infinitesimal atoms, without eliminating one iota of their soul-crushing power.

"You can do it so much better than I," Paul had said, when pleading for his own exemption, as if there were degrees of excellence in stabbing a fellow creature. And the minister had consented, leaving the Homestead converted into a house of mourning, by reason of its sheeted dead.

Mr. Samuels's call for "Mr. Ames, alone," was not responded to immediately. Mr. Ames was writing the closing paragraph upon a sermon, and he never allowed visitors to interfere with that serious occupation; so the younger clergyman had ten or a dozen heavy moments left on his hands, in which to become more timid, more nervous, more tremulous than he had ever known himself before.

The gray minister came presently, as erect of bearing, as rigid of manner, as cold of eye, as he had been any time the last forty years. He looked time in the face with the same bold defiance that he meted out to powerless humanity.

Mr. Samuels's strength of purpose came back to him in that stony presence. Surely, that iron man would prove equal to bearing everything, even the harrowing recital then burdening his own tenderer breast.

More the less gently and tenderly, though, does he tell all his horrible story.

The minister of Wickam Church, after one convulsive start, and a single groan, which nature, rebelling against discipline, gives utterance to, heard him through without other sign or token that these evil tidings bore in any manner more heavily upon him than upon the bronze sphinx there upon the mantel clock.

Mr. Samuels sighs, relieved. His share of a hated task is accomplished. Then, a silence so dead, so complete, so oppressive, as to make it seem as if the end of all things has come with the end of Augustus Ames, falls upon the little parlor. The clock, a slow-striking, hoarse-throated clock, tolls twelve deliberately, monotonously, harshly, like some soulless bell-ringer, tolling the allotted knell for some one's dead darling, in utter indif-

ference to the aching hearts, throbbing and pulsing with anguish, somewhere within sound of each slow-coming clang. A troop of emancipated school-boys dash noisily past the rectory windows; their mirthful voices float discordantly in upon the sorrowful stillness. The shutters are only bowed, and through the arch, a broad, slanting sunbeam falls just across the old man's knees—his gray eyes are fixed upon it, but there is no speculation in them. Presently, his large withered hand goes out into the broad ray, among the thick coming motes, the gay, bright things dancing there like fairy sprites in the moon's silver path, disturb him; he tries to brush the motes from out the sunbeam. Will he never have done with his warfare upon motes? A shining black-bug, made bold by the night-like silence, creeps stealthily along the dusty carpet, to meet a grinding fate under the rector's heel. Every sense seems quivering with vitality, straining after an outlet.

Mr. Samuels looks at the self-contained man in wonder at the strong hand contending with the dancing motes—at the tight-pressed lips—and marvels whence this marble calm. Is it heartlessness, or is it the complete subjugation of the man's self? Is it exaltation above the possibility of suffering, or is it the in-born conviction that "earth has no sorrow which Heaven cannot heal?"

"And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly, my hope is even in Thee."

It is the gray clergyman's voice that breaks the silence with the offertory of the Christian's submission, even in the first hour of the father's agony, and Harris Samuels bows his head, as the offertory floats heavenward, in gentle reverence for the strong old man that offers it.

Then Mr. Ames remembers that he is not alone.

"My young friend, your office has been no kindly one. You have acquitted yourself well. I thank you, and, may I add, good morning."

Left to himself, alone with his God, St. John Ames bowed his stricken head, until the long gray hair swept his knees, and the sunny motes danced merrily round about it, while David's anguished wail burst from his aching heart: "My son! My son!"

Long and bitter were the throes of mortal agony—of yearning desire to call back

the dead that pardon might be craved for a life time of sternness—of bitter un-availing remorse for that sternness, that the stern old man endured there, unseen, unpitied, save by his Maker. Then came thoughts of the weaker vessel upon whom this same vial of wrath had been emptied.

"Poor wife! Poor mother!" After a while the minister of Wickam girded up his loins for a fiery ordeal, and prayed for strength to press this bitter cup home to lips that would find it hard to say "Thy will be done," while draining it to the dregs.

"Maria! Wife!" A faint blush stole over the wife's faded features. It had been so long since St. John had come to her, and taken her hand so gently in between his own, and called her 'Wife' so kindly. It carried her back to a bridal moon waned now long, long ago. She did not speak! He would say all he had to say without encouragement. Her eyes drooped until they rested on their clasped hands; the hands were thin and wrinkled and old now, but had they ever failed to do what they had promised on that long-ago morning, when they were locked together in the sight of God and man? Had the promise of that morning brought all she had hoped for? Oh, foolish wife! Idle introspection! sprung from the clasping of one time-withered hand within another! Born of a gentle tone and an unwonted caress.

But teach a woman the folly of analyzing the is, and to cease the dreaming about the "might have been," and thou canst loose the bands of Orion.

"Maria, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward!"

Mrs. Ames gave a nervous start; she had been straying in such pleasant paths, going over again the early wedded years, when it was not so rare to have that poor, thin hand caressed, that she was not quite prepared for a week day sermon.

"Yes, Mr. Ames," she says very indifferently, for he had been impressing like uncheerful aphorisms upon her, for more than a quarter of a century now, so she could not display any very lively interest at this resumption of a threadbare topic. After all, then, he had only come there to be monotonous.

"Do you think," the minister resumes, his voice growing less steady the nearer he approaches the awful revels

"do you think, my dear Maria, you are blessed with that lively faith which will enable you, come what may, to bow to the rod?"

Ratiocination may be useful to men. Women have no need for it; their conclusions come to them, they do not go to their conclusions. Mr. Ames was so gentle, so patient, so affectionate, that something terrible had happened. It was Augustus!

"Tell me, my boy, what is it!"

Then he told her. Not with the gentle, womanlike tenderness, with which the Rev. Harris Samuels had told it to him, because it was not in him so to do; but he did his very best to tell it gently. Who can do more?

Then they came from far and near, well-meaning and kindly, to pour the doubtful balm of wordy condolence into the torn heart of a mother weeping for her first-born.

Wan, weary and hopeless, she listened to them all with a child-like meekness, pitiful in its gentleness. Only when the prosperous sister came, speaking so flippantly of the bitterness of losing a dear one, generalizing in the modish black silk (in which the Judge's lady had toned down her magnificence for "poor Maria's sake"), about this vale of tears, daring, in her proud, care-free immunity from toil and trouble, to ally herself as a co-heir with this stricken mother, in man's inheritance of woe, the pale, worn sufferer turned upon her with a querulous impatience, wrung from a heart that had borne very long and very patiently a load, under which this serene comforter would have faltered and sunk, moaning aloud against high Heaven's pitilessness.

"Catharine! Catharine! Not from you. What do you know of my mighty agony—your Paul, living, lusty, yours? What do you know of this 'vale of tears?' You, who since we were little children together, have been shielded from every rude wind. What do you know of the shadows in which my life must drag out—you, whose lines have fallen in such pleasant places? Let those who are indeed my fellow-sufferers, come to me, and tell me that they know what it is! Success and happiness have been yours all your life. When you talk of sorrow, it is like the babbling of an ignorant little child. Go! Go back to your handsome home, your successful husband, your

beautiful boy! They are all yours. I would not have you one shade less happy, less prosperous. But do not—Oh! Catty, I grow so weak, so wicked, God forgive me! St. John asked me if I could bow me to the rod. Not yet, not yet. He asks it of me too soon. The mother is mighty in me; the Christian is weak, so weak. And He took him away when it seemed hardest to give him up. Just when I was growing proud of him, sure of him. Just when he had become lord of himself. Father of mercy, Thou hast made Thy yoke very grievous. Kiss me, Kate, and go away, dear. You can do me no good. It is not your fault. You came out of the pure kindness of your kind heart. Give me but a little time, I will conquer this wicked rebellion. But now, now, Catty, your diamonds mock me. They flash at me so brightly, in the darkness he has cast me into. Go, sister. Send me the widows and the fatherless and the childless. Send me those who can say to me, 'Be of good cheer, for as thou art, so once was I,' and them I will take for my comforters."

Yet a little while, and the minister's wife took up her cross once more, going about her narrowed round of duties, a little paler, and a little thinner, but no longer rebellious. Where there was sickness, where there was moaning, where there were sad hearts to be cheered, there she was very sure to be. After that one outburst of petulant misery in presence of her sister, no murmur was ever heard to cross her lips.

And the father! He, whose life had been one prolonged and uncalled-for sacrifice of Nature's promptings on the altar of an iron will! No one could say that it was remorse, for every act of his life had been squared by duty's unerring rule. No one could say that it was repentance, for why should a man repent him of doing as duty commanded. But as the days went gliding by, the rigid form grew less erect, the gray eyes lost their steadfast gaze, and learned a trick of drooping wearily earthward when he walked along, as if looking for something he was never to find. The harsh voice grew feeble and less dictatorial, sounding a late apology for the stern judgments, he, a feeble, erring mortal, had passed upon his fellow-man. His now white hair fell about a face grown newly careworn. A sadness, which was never

more to be lifted, softened the stern face into a touching pathos.

People said that "the minister of Wickam Church had brcken," his usefulness was waning, his pews were left empty, he no longer had the power nor the desire to fulminate wrathful dicta.

So the day soon came when Wesley Weyland's prophesy was fulfilled, and he was reduced to a feeble constituency of women and children.

But still the Lord's vineyard is his chosen field of labor, and feebly will he labor on to the bitter end.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MINISTER'S WOOING.

"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that nature might stand up
And say to all the world, This was a man!"

—*Shakespeare.*

It was the first organ-lesson Delphine had tried to take since she had sat in the family pew, up near the pulpit, and listened to the funeral services of Augustus Ames. And the lesson was a failure.

This had always been her "white hour"—the calm evening hour when she and Mr. Samuels and Lucy would walk over to the little church and sing "the birds to sleep." The darkness that would come creeping round about them, was a gentle, hallowed obscurity, void of gloom or terror. Sometimes, the moon would send slanting rays down upon them through the tall chancel-window, and then she would move away from the organ and beg her teacher to take her place—for a solemn hush would come over her, with the white moonlight gleaming among the empty pews, that disinclined to words or actions, while she, with idle hands and voiceless lips, worshiped there in her own untaught way.

But this evening everything was wrong. The air of the church had grown vault-like. She could see poor Gus's bier still standing before the chancel every time she turned her head that way. The darkness fell so suddenly. Who knew it was so late, and why should Lucy, this evening of all evenings, have failed to come?

"It is useless, Mr. Samuels, worse than useless. I feel miserable and wicked down to my very finger tips. There's no music in my soul this evening,

I am quite fit for treason, stratagem and spoil. Which do you incline to?"

"The treason I think you are giving utterance to now," Mr. Samuels answers lightly, but his gentle face clouds up with disappointment. When could he ever feel quite sure of this bright comet-like creature, radiant and erratic, absolutely defiant of any circumscribed orbit? "That you should feel sad is right and natural, and that word 'wicked,' which you are so ready in handling, will, I imagine, stand analysis."

"No, indeed; no! I really mean that I feel diabolical. (How could she tell him of the stormy encounter at home that morning, in which a rage-frenzied mother had stooped to personal abuse, when she had loftily refused to admit M. Emile Girardeau's addresses, or of the tiresome sermon she had been subjected to subsequently from Mother Danbury's pious lips, upon the sin of disobedience? Between them all Eleanor Morgan's fair and stately fily was fast drooping earthward). Where's the use of being good and pious and prayerful? The harder one tries, the more temptations to wickedness spring up. The best people I know are the unhappiest. It is not true that if you ask you shall receive. Don't we all know that Aunt Maria's whole life was one prayer for her son's welfare and happiness? And certainly, she was righteous enough for her prayers to avail. But her son was horribly murdered, and she and her husband (who ought to be a man after God's own heart, if God likes men who mortify the flesh and resist the devil and all that sort of thing) are made utterly wretched for life, while Uncle Weyland and Aunt Catherine, who don't pray to anybody, get along splendidly, have everything they want, and could not possibly be any happier. And look at Evelyn Morgan—gentle, holy, pure-hearted saint, who never hurt a worm in all her sinless life—doomed to a lifetime of the most horrible suffering. And your own good mother, did she not pray that the bitter cup might pass from her, when she knew she was destined to live on in total darkness? I repeat it—all the good people I know are the unhappy ones, and all the wicked ones happy."

"Then, when you say you are perfectly wretched and diabolically wicked in one breath, what becomes of your theory of life?" He was very patient with her

—he did not care to pelt that drooping head with hard theological pebbles, any more than one would care to quiet a fretful baby by reasoning with it about the idleness of tears.

"Oh! You will not find it at all difficult to pick out paradoxes in my statements. But I have good authority for them. Mr. Samuels, how do you good people explain away good Scripture paradoxes—or do you leave them unexplained, and just swallow them whole, trusting to Providence for their spiritual digestion?"

The pastor's face looked troubled. He had labored faithfully, tenderly and diligently over this wayward lamb that had given him more trouble than all the rest of his easily-folded flock, and there were times when his heart glowed with a pardonable pride over the promise of success held out by the gentleness and docility of her conduct. But now, there she sat in open rebellion, looking so bright, so beautiful in her defiance, that the man in him bowed in passionate adoration, even while the pastor said in grave rebuke:

"Come, let us leave God's temple, it is not a fit place for the treason you declared yourself ready for. I think I shall take you home. We will talk about these matters when you are calmer. Something has disturbed you today, and, as we are all so prone to do, you cry out against high Heaven, and charge it with neglect of your puny affairs."

"From you, too!" The girl's proud lip quivered. Here, at least, she had never met rebuke. Was all the world turned against her?

"Yes. But you must bear in mind whose livery I boast. What would you think of your humblest servitor, if he could stand mute, while a fellow-servant impugned your goodness or justice?"

"Why do you always try to make me feel so small in my own estimation? And you succeed, too."

They had left the church now, and he was taking her home as he had said he would. He drew her hand within his arm, and left her last question unanswered, for his own soul was too full for words.

He loved this bright wayward girl, and wanted to make her his wife. He knew very well she was not just yet all that a *minister's wife* should be, but he thought *could trust to time to aid him in ton-*

ing down this surface petulance, and, when once her true nature should become her abiding nature, she would be all that he could ask or desire. He had not intended to say anything to her just yet. But she was unhappy—he could always tell it by these moody, discontented outbursts.

In truth, Delphine Staunton was groping helplessly in a moral darkness for the lamp to her feet, which a dying father had endeavored to secure for his orphaned girl by putting her in the wise keeping of Eleanor Morgan. But destiny had overruled his foresight by substituting a vain and frivolous mother for a wise and gentle guardian. She was young and saw through a glass, darkly. She reasoned in a crude, finite way, from her own childish observations. That her principles were not fixed above the vacillation of weak minds, must be charged to the diverse character of the influences brought to bear upon her. The Morgans, moral but liberal; the Weylands, liberal and careless; her mother, careless of all save outward form; her uncle, Mr. Ames, presenting religion in its gloomiest garb; Mother Danbury, sincere but narrow, presenting it in its most poverty-stricken aspect. Who was right? Whose ways were most acceptable to the Ruler of destinies? Whom should she follow? From the profundity of her perplexity sprang her wordy rebellion.

Much of her perplexity Mr. Samuels knew of; still more he guessed at. How his heart yearned over her! How he longed to draw her out of this vexing conflict of examples, to lead her heavenward by the road he himself had chosen. What good reason was there why he should not ask for this crowning blessing to his life?

"Small in your own estimation, Delphine, I should hardly dare to do that, when you have made for yourself such a lofty place in my own!"

He had never called her Delphine before; in fact, it was very seldom, indeed, that he dropped into personalities in his conversation, and of all personalities his own seemed ever farthest away from mind or lips.

She turned towards him with unaffected gladness in face and voice.

"Then I am not altogether too obstinate and wayward for you to like me? Life is so dark with me, unless I have

some one near me to love me and pet me. I think, maybe, Max and Nonee spoiled me and unfitted me for what has come. It is so different now. I wonder if unkindness makes everybody feel as wicked as I do under it. When those near and dear to me, those from whom I have the best right to look for patience and sympathy and tenderness, mete me out instead harshness and injustice and coldness. God help me! How dark the whole world grows, and how all the good in one seems to shrivel up, until there's none left."

"I think I know just what you feel. It is natural and not the peculiar offspring of any particular wickedness in yourself. I think, too, I know just what you want."

"I want love and kindness. Give me those, and I can always be at my best."

"I think I can promise you both."

"Oh, I know you can," she answers with grateful alacrity, utterly unconscious that she is being wooed, "for you are always the same gentle, kind friend, and so is Lucy and dear Mrs. Samuels, and I do not know what I should do without you all three. You are all the comfort I have in this sad, new life. But I cannot just explain to you this hunger to be petted and caressed, and made a great deal over, as if you were such a deal of importance in a household, as they used to spoil me in Wickam; but it does not spoil a woman to be made such a deal of; it is the wine of life to her, and when it is gone, the dregs taste so bitter—so bitter. Don't speak. I know just what you will say. You will preach to me about the duty of endurance, of cheerfulness, and of fortitude. I know it all by heart, and I recognize the duty, too. But then, why should people make endurance and cheerfulness so hard—so very, very hard. I know what it is my duty to be and do. All I ask is for some manner of recognition after that duty has been performed—some one to lay a hand on your head, or to kiss you once in a great while, or to put an arm about you caressingly—it goes farther than words. My life, my strength, all the ability to do any good thing, lies in it. Now, I have grown egotistical, and poured out all my secret trouble to you. You have been patient in listening; but I know I have wearied you."

"I have been more quiet than patient.

I have been indeed a little impatient for you to cease, so that I might say something that it has been on my mind to say for a long time past. I am not going to preach. Your outburst has not even furnished me a text. I simply wanted to tell you once more that I can promise you both the love and kindness you crave. Not the placid affection of your pastor, Delphine, but a warm, ardent devotion, which impels me to ask you to be my wife."

In the few years of her association with this gentle, unselfish, holy man, Delphine Staunton had come to look upon him as a sort of purified spirit, encumbered with a body for mere temporary convenience, while he labored in his Master's service here below. And to have this embodied spirit come to her after the fashion of men, and ask her to be his wife, produced in her a conflict of feelings too full of awe to be ranked with commonplace surprise—too full of amazement to be linked with pleasure.

She was quite still, and he went on:

"I so little ever thought of asking any one to be my wife, that I cannot woo you in set and elegant phrases. It is a matter I have spent very little thought upon. To me it would be a good and pleasant thing to have you always with me. I have thought so when I have seen you with my mother and sister, who love you very dearly, and I thought so this evening, when you spoke of your desires to be the nearest and the dearest thing in some one's life"—

"But," she interrupted quickly, catching her breath nervously, and blushing crimson under the veil of the dark, "I was not talking or thinking of husbands and wives."

Mr. Samuels laughs that little, low musical laugh, which is his nearest approach to hilarity.

"Granted. But is that any reason why you should decline bringing the idea of husbands and wives to bear upon this great hunger you talk about?"

"You would make a good woman of me," she says thoughtfully.

"I should help you to make one of yourself."

"In return for which I would make you—a very wretched man. You do not know what you are asking."

"Yes. For I have not asked it on the spur of sudden feeling, or an impulse

pity. I told you it had been on my mind to say it a long time."

"And now that you have said it, I do not know what to say in reply. I have always thought of you as something set apart and above the worries of small, sinning humanity. I have never thought of you as needing or desiring a help-mate, as other men need and desire them. And, I hardly feel thankful to you for stepping down from your pedestal in this unsolicited fashion, even if it was to do me a most unmerited honor."

"Remember, please, that your placing me upon the pedestal, was, also, an unsolicited honor. I am in no ways, Delphine, exalted above the desires and temptations of my kind. Least of all am I removed from the universal desire to love and to be loved. I have offered you, in bungling fashion, perhaps, the best offering any man can bring to a woman—the offer of sincere and honest affection. I seem to have taken you very much by surprise. So much so, that I think it would neither be just to yourself nor to me for you to answer at once. Not just to yourself—for, if you should incline to an affirmative answer, it might be that your present frame of mind would influence you towards the man who offers you love and kindness when they seem least attainable from other sources. Not just to me, for I want you to think about me in this matter not as one exalted by his calling above the ordinary level of mankind, and therefore, an object of awe and reverence. I want you to look at me, now that I have come down from the pedestal of your own erection, as a man who is capable of loving very dearly, and who is deeply in earnest in his desire to make you his wife."

"Now, I am going to leave you, and when your mind is fully and calmly made up, you will let me know."

"How many days am I to have for thinking?" she asks the question in the timid voice of a child frightened at her task.

"Days!" (His voice is full of gentle scorn). "It would take you days to decide upon the shape of your fall hat!"

"Weeks, then."

"I shall not limit you. Strange, is it not, how loath people are to bring calm deliberation to bear upon this, the best crisis of a life? The choice of

a profession in life, the choice of land upon which to build a crumbling tenement, the choice of a partner for a business transaction—almost any choice we can be called upon to make, may without reproach (indeed, the contrary would cause reproach), be made matter of lengthy, calm, sober deliberation; only marriage, the one awful, unalterable decision man and woman is called upon to make, must be denied the wise counsel of the head, and left entirely to the unbridled impulses of the heart. This is not as it should be. It is not as I wish it to be with us. You must be deliberate and I will be patient."

Then he went away, and left her standing upon her own steps, feeling strangely doubtful as to whether she had been lectured or courted.

She did not go into the house immediately. The moon was full and bright, and she stood there watching the minister's retreating form as he walked down the broad gravel path that gleamed white and distinct in the clear light of the moon.

It seemed as if she was looking at the man, Harris Samuels, for the first time. She had never thought to note how graceful his tall, slender form was, nor how perfectly his well-shaped head was poised. Yes, he was handsome, undoubtedly, and his eyes had rested on her with such perfect love, kindling them in to a new brightness! It was surely a great honor to win the love of such a man. She felt it very deeply. Then why was it that even in the moment that she assured herself she was being honored—in the very moment when she repeated to herself again and again that the companionship he offered her would ensure her for life the loving kindness she missed so, now that Max and Eleanor were lost to her—why was it that she was fully conscious of a disappointed feeling in the minister who had just gotten through with his placid, quiet wooing? Why was it that she felt strangely resentful towards him in the midst of her gratitude? As her pastor, her St. Paul, as she loved to call him, he had been perfect in her eyes, and she had loved to think of him as something better and truer than common mortals. It was this feeling which had made it so easy for her to seek counsel and comfort at his hands. But St. Paul had deliberately come down from his high estate and de

manded that she should regard him as a common mortal, and this she resented. But then, he had said it was an unsolicited pedestal she had perched him upon. And, again, there was something altogether unsatisfying about this unexpected wooing. She had never been wooed before, but she had felt in a vague sort of way that, in common with every other woman, she should be some of these days. When, how, and by whom, were the vaguest points of all. But, somehow, there was none of the fire and glow and delicious bewilderment, that she had fancied necessary auxiliaries to a true wooing o't. She felt as still and cold and collected as if she and the pastor had gotten through with their organ lesson with the usual placid satisfaction. Would she feel thus if she was in love? But then, what was her feeling for him if it was not love? She could not analyze her own sensations, and being altogether ignorant of the fact that it is our finest and truest feelings which will not bear the cold eye of analysis, she turned her about and entered the house, in hardly a more serene frame of mind than she had left it an hour or two before. It was with satisfaction she remembered that he had insisted on her being very deliberate.

She paused on her way to her own room to inquire dutifully into her mother's physical condition. She found her clothed and vivacious.

Father Richards was once more their guest!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SISTER AZUBAH."

"—And lo, a cell,
Narrow and dark, naught thro' the gloom discerned;
Nought save the crucifix, the rosary,
And the gray-habit lying by to shroud
Her beauty and grace."
—Rogers.

And at last Delphine has found her Gamaliel!

Father Richards has come to her in the hour of her extremity, and she sits at his feet in child-like humility, conscious that all her doubts and perplexities are melting into misty nothings in the fervid heat of his eloquence.

Here at last is gentleness, learning, piety and power combined—combined in the person of a man who has put away

from him the pomp and vanity of every selfish desire, and is content to live out his little span, uncheered by wife and child, so that his Master's work shall be the better done.

He does not tell her that she is a child, and must wait for the ripening of her judgment, to make all that is now so dark and vexing, simple and clear. He does not try to convince her that her troubles are imaginary. Nor does he suggest marriage as the great panacea for all a woman's troubles.

On the contrary, he agrees with her when she declares the world hollow and disappointing. He agrees with her when she calls the on-coming years but so many heralds of fresh trouble and anxiety of spirit.

And then, before the girl's yearning vision he holds up the picture of the nun's blessed exemption from the wearing, grinding cares of a worldling's life. The peace which passeth all understanding is hers! The divine quietude which can only come to those who have closed the door of their hearts against the world is hers! If she has nothing to hope for here below, neither has she anything to fear! He who is in the world must be of it. Whom the world satisfies, let him remain in and of it. But to whom the world is but a snare and a pitfall, the cloister opens wide its arms, promising protection, peace, security!

The vexed question was solved! Happy in her home? No. With her mother, this strange, unloved, uncongenial mother, she could never be happy. Happy as Mr. Samuels's wife? No. As a minister's wife she would be a source of torment to herself and every one about her. Striving after that perfection she could never attain, yet, without which as a minister's wife, she would be a by-word and a reproach. Those alone whom she had loved with all the force of her passionate nature, she would never see again, save at rare intervals, and as ordinary acquaintances.

Mr. Samuels had promised her love and kindness. And he would fulfil his promise, she well knew, but he was powerless to shield her sensitive nature from the pricks and stings of petty worldlings. Father Richards promised her love and kindness with the pricking, stinging world shut out. "Peace on earth!" was the device upon his standard, and who could look into those calm eyes of

his, or note the majestic repose of the whole man, and doubt that he had found it himself?

"I will go with you, uncle; but you must give me a little while to make my last will and testament. Say a week." She closes her sentence with a nervous little laugh; but she is very white and still after it, and getting up, presently, she goes away to her own room to finish that week's diary and despatch it to Maxwell Morgan.

"DEAR MAX: I am writing you the last diary I shall ever send off to you; for I have found a way out of all the worries of this stupid, dull life of mine, and I have gladly clasped the hand held out to lead me through the door of the convent into the abode of peace. I have tried so hard, Max, dear, to write to you always cheerfully; for you remember what you said to me about making things harder for you and Nonee, by being gloomy and obstinate? But I am worn out with the struggle!

I tried to love my mother. I could not. She has yet to develop one lovable trait. Mr. Samuels asked me to be his wife, and for about half an hour I thought maybe I would say 'yes.' It was wicked for me to think so for half a second. It was altogether selfish. But I do believe there is no good left in me, since I've lost you and Nonee. So what is there better for me to do than to go with Uncle Richards and become a nun? I can look back upon the time when the thought of such an existence would have driven me wild with horror. But how differently things look now. What is there in my home but a mother who spends her days in slovenliness, novel-reading and sleeping? Poor old Dan, faithful but not soul-satisfying, and his narrow-souled mother? Surely I will find in the companionship of my sister nuns pleasant and brighter days than these. Uncle Richards pictures their busy, tranquil lives so beautifully, I long for the happy seclusion of the convent, Max, as a delightful change from the dull fretfulness of my present life.

I promised you that I would take no step of any importance without consulting you. But you have gone so far away from me that I will have no time to consult you; for I have promised Uncle Richards to go with him one week from tonight. But you spoke of steps in which my welfare might be jeopardized. In this one it is being secured forever.

Don't feel sorry for me, Max, as I know people do feel about young girls who enter convents. It is my present life that should call down your pity.

Indeed, indeed, dear Max, I have tried to be strong and cheerful, but it is so hard with--

one to help you and every one to

try you; and when I found I could not really be cheerful under it all, I tried to make believe every time I wrote to you or saw Nonee. But now, rejoice with me, for I have found a way out of it all, and before this reaches you I will be beyond the reach of your pen—beyond the reach of your reproaches—beyond the reach of the narrow, selfish, repining existence your 'Calamity' has lived ever since she was torn away from those she loves best and alone of all the world.

And now, good-by. A long, a solemn, an irrevocable good-by from Delphine Staunton. 'Sister Azubah' (which means deserted Max) sends you greeting."

"DEAR NONEE: As your brother has become such a wanderer of late, I am utterly at a loss to know how to convey this to him, so I send it to you to be forwarded."

And the next day Sergeant Danbury carries the fateful package to the post office, taking Father Richards with him as far as the depot, to return the coming week for his convert.

Delphine's valedictory travelled to Wickam, but no further. It was put into Miss Morgan's hand just a little while after she had finished reading a letter from Max, telling her he would be with them in a day or two, accompanied by M. Brousseau, who would be his guest during his stay in Wickam.

"M. Brousseau has retained me as his counsel in an affair, which, if I conduct successfully, will place me in a position financially, Eleanor, to render me independent of all scruples against asking your ward to be my wife, because she is an heiress. I am not cured, you will say. No, nor shall I ever be cured of the deepest, tenderest, most abiding affection for our Heaven-loaned darling."

This closing sentence in Max's letter—a letter so full of hope and buoyancy—was still ringing in Eleanor's ears, when Delphine's communication of her firm resolve to go with her uncle, the priest, in one week's time, came to her.

Their darling buried in a convent! Her great heart beat with a feverish anxiety for Max's coming. This monstrous sacrifice must not be! But if he should be delayed, and should return to receive only this poor child's piteous farewell as the reward for his tender constancy! A future of joy or woe for her two dear ones, lay wavering in the balance of the days, and she could do nothing but wait and pray.

Should she write and let the child

know that Max was expected home in a few days? Yes, she would persuade her to give him the poor satisfaction of a personal farewell, and then—and then—then Max must work out his own salvation!

So by the return mail a heart-warming little note was despatched to "Sister Azubah," elect.

"My darling, you have been taken from my guardianship, and I dare not say you shall or you shall not do this thing. I only ask you not to be precipitate. Wait. I am in daily expectation of Max's return, accompanied by M. Brousseau, who is coming to America on business of importance. When your guardian arrives, we must have you with us awhile. With the old affection,

ELEANOR."

Careless in most matters, Mrs. Staunton was rigid in asserting her right to a first inspection of the mail-bag. So Delphine turned away with a disappointed face, when Madame looked up calmly from the package in her hand, and said: "Nothing for you, Della, dear."

So Della goes away for her lonely ramble, and Madame rolls a pen-handle boldly but carefully under the lip of a sealed envelope, and obtains news which would have made glad the heart of her daughter, wandering about under the big oaks in an aimless, listless fashion, but which sends the angry blood bounding and throbbing through her own system, until it all seems to settle under the dark brow, and fill the veins on her forehead to bursting.

A fierce tinkling of her bell brings Tony, fleet of foot, dull of eye, discreet of utterance.

He stands solemnly by, while Madame's pen flies with savage rapidity over a sheet of note paper.

"There, do you know who to take it to?"

"Yes'm," Tony replies, with what is intended for a knowing look.

"And what do you get, if you do your errand well?"

"Suger'n 'lasses."

"And if you do not do it well?"

"My yers git pinched."

"Go! A brilliant go-between! If there were not greater fools than he around me, the danger might be increased. Mais—bah! This America is a nation of fools—simple fools—too simple to be anything but honest. And yet, the greatest fool I know—is Emile Girardeau!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A REQUIEM TERMINATING IN A PÆAN.

"Over him rushed, like a wind that is keen and cold and relentless,
Thoughts of what might have been, and the weight
and woe of his errand;
All the dreams that had faded, and all the hopes that
had vanished."

—Longfellow.

But one more day remained to Delphine, in which to loosen and cast from her all the ties, great and small, which bound her to a world, with which, of late, she had grown so bitterly dissatisfied. The morrow would bring Father Richards.

Her extremity had been his opportunity. And with him were to come so many good and pleasant things. Peace, daily companionship with the best and purest of her own sex, a life of placid usefulness, and above all, relief from the dread responsibility of shaping her own course, manufacturing her own creed. There were wise and holy men where she was going to lay down gentle but inviolable laws for her spiritual guidance. She had found the church that would take care of her.

Still, this week had not been a joyous one. The joyousness was all to come. She has yet to learn that "Man never is, but always to be, blessed." She did not find it easy to speak freely of the great change so soon to come into her life, much less to tell all her astonished hearers the why of her resolution. It was bitter-sweet to see the great and unspeakable sorrow surging up over poor old "Dan's" rough face, until he hid it in the big hands that had labored faithfully and affectionately in the service of the little lady, who was going to turn her back upon them in a desertion worse than death, and shed the first tears that had wet his cheeks since the master died. After all, then, she was smiting some tender hearts sorely. But she had put her hand to the plough, and she must not look back.

Ever mindful of the filial respect which was all the poor substitute her sincere nature had yet afforded for filial affection, she had penetrated into her mother's disorderly obscurity, immediately after her priestly uncle's departure to impart her information.

She found that lady had promptly substituted her unfinished novel for the

rosary which had been most conspicuous during the "Father's" sojourn, and was joined unto her idols once more.

Simply and coldly, Della informed her mother of her fixed resolve to retire from the world.

"A nun! My handsome daughter in serge and a funny white bonnet." Madame laughs that harsh, scoffing laugh of hers, which is but an audible sneer.

"You will not miss me, mother. For though you came all the way across the ocean to hunt me up, I have long since known that I was not at all necessary to your happiness. I do not want to reproach you, for I suppose it is neither your fault nor mine that we could not bring the love that should be between us at our bidding. God knows I have tried—tried and failed. This house, of course, will always be your home. I shall ask my guardian to substitute your name for mine in my quarterly remittance."

"Ask your guardian!" The laugh and the sneer are gone, and in their place a frightened, hunted look fills her mother's beautiful eyes.

"More correctly, write to him. I never expect to see him. But that will not interfere with my desire to secure you against want. You know I am not rich, mother, but the remittance upon which we have both managed to live, will suffice you—even including your novels." The girl's voice is fuller than her words of scorn.

Mrs. Staunton realizes that she is in earnest at last. A face full of perplexity is turned upon Della.

"My child, Delphine. You do not mean this. I listened at first at what I thought girlish petulance. You do not know what you are doing. You do not know what you are throwing away. Marry! Marry Emile Girardeau, and you will bless the first voice that was raised in protest against your sacrifice. I"—

"Stop, mother! I did not come here to reopen old issues. Do not provoke me into saying anything unkind. I am not as happy as I was before you came. I do know what I am throwing away. I simply came as a matter of form to tell you what I am about to do. We will be together one week longer, then you will be alone. Not more so, however, than I have been, ever since I have been dependent upon you for companionship."

She was gone, leaving her mother for once not ready with a biting retort.

"A week! Much may be done in seven days! Yes, much, if one had anything better than two obstinate fools to work upon." Madame lays aside her novel; the charm of it is broken. She has work to do—earnest, hard, protracted brain work!

To the Samuels Delphine dared not go. She sent a simple message to the minister, that she should take her organ lesson on Thursday evening, if it pleased him. (On Friday morning Father Richards was to return.)

She went quite early to the little church on the Thursday she had appointed. She wanted the house and the organ all to herself—she wanted no lamps lighted—she wanted no human voice to question, no human ear to listen, no human eye to pry upon her in this, her supreme moment. It was her own requiem she had come there to play; and as the soft, full melody of the instrument swelled upon the air, her whole life seemed setting itself as the words to the tender, pleading rhythm of the music. Now, wailing slow and plaintive through her orphaned infancy, then, in leisurely graceful adagio through the peace-crowned days of early childhood, tripping in light staccato of the love-sunned years of girlhood, dying into a solemn largo over her shorn and desolated years, swelling at last into an anthem of triumph over the proud, glad day to come.

The anthem was ended, but the player with clasped hands and bowed head, swayed forward in a tempest of conflicting emotions.

A firm, quick tread upon the steps that lead up to the organ-loft sends a thrill of nervous dread through the girl's slender form.

"He is coming—coming for his answer. How firmly he treads. It is the proud footfall of a conqueror!"

A hand is laid very gently on her bowed head—a voice trembling with its weight of feeling, calls her name.

She raises her head, but not to look at him—only to let her words go up to him where he stands there, over her, clearly, distinctly, so that she may not have to repeat them.

"You have come to me for your answer. Please forgive me for the pain I am about to cause you. I am going with Father Richards tomorrow to become a nun. That is the best and surest

way out of all my troubles. I shall never be anyone's wife. There, I have answered you."

"Sister Azubah, look upward—always upward!"

She obeys the voice, which is not the pastor's voice.

"Max!"

Clearly, gladly, triumphantly, his name rings out upon the evening air, and then she is cradled in the strong arms that are pressing her close, closer to a heart, true enough and manly enough to meet all the anxious exactments of that long-dead father.

Mr. Samuels had come for his answer and had received it. One monosyllable had answered him. That glad-ringing "Max" that had thrilled the returned Bohemian with the fullness of perfected happiness, had fallen with joy-killing distinctness upon the gentle pastor's ears, as he sat in the large chair within the chancel, listening to the girl's inspired performance, not caring to go to her until the wonderful melody should die of its own sweetness.

For one short moment he stood there irresolute, his eyes fastened with a sorrowful fascination upon the two figures up in the organ-loft. This bronzed, kingly intruder held her unresisting form in a tender embrace, her beautiful head lay pillowed peacefully on another's shoulder.

"She has found what she wanted. She does not need me," he says to himself very softly. Then, turning him about, he leaves the church quietly, so that they may never know that another eye had rested even for one second on the solemn joy of their meeting.

He does not leave the church altogether. In the privacy of the vestry-room he kneels and prays very fervently for the power to conquer this one love of his life—a love, as pure and sinless as that life; but now, in a moment, become guilt. Prays that "time may lay his hand upon his heart, gently, not smiting it, but, as a harper lays his open palm upon his harp to deaden its vibration."

And while he is praying there in secret, the woman he loves is looking up into the proud, happy face of Maxwell Morgan (her own transfigured by the mightiness of her love and happiness into a starry radiance), and is saying in the old bright way:

"But, Max, I am not worth the having."

A woman who has succeeded so poorly in making anything in particular of herself, who thought, not half an hour ago, that she was yearning after holiness, when all the time she was just yearning for you—a woman who is standing here so happy, that she's grown heartlessly indifferent to the unhappiness you you are compelling her to inflict upon one of the best and truest of men—a woman who has given away all her worldly possession and said to everybody 'good-by,' and now has to unsay it. Oh, Max, what a ridiculous sort of woman I am. I repeat it, I am not worth the having."

"It is because I am afraid others may come to the same mortifying conclusion, that I am going to take you myself, Sister Azubah."

"But, Max, I am not a Catholic, nor an Episcopalian, nor anything."

"Yes you are, my darling," Max says, very tenderly, adding, more gravely, "and, as for the rest of it, my own, remember that—"

"He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things, both great and small."

"But what shall I say to Father Richards?"

"Nothing. I shall tell him that I have appropriated the material from which he would have manufactured a very poor nun, to convert into a very good wife.

Then he draws her hand within his arm and together they leave the church.

"He prayeth best who loveth best," Della repeats, softly. "After all, Max, what is religion but love, love but religion? It is so easy to be good when one is happy."

And if not orthodox my heroine is right.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR.

— "Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme."

—Shakespeare.

M. Emile Girardeau, returning to his lodgings after an absence of several days, found upon his table a letter addressed in the delicate chirography of Mrs. William Staunton, written in the French language.

He seemed in no great haste to discover what Madame had to say. In fact, Mad-

ame's notes came too often to be very welcome, and treated generally of subjects that were none too pleasant in themselves.

So he proceeded very deliberately about the toilette upon which he was depending as a powerful auxiliary in bringing the object of his most ardent devotion to terms.

He was in the most serene frame of mind; nay, rather a triumphant frame of mind. This little absence of his had been in consequence of a very attractive advertisement, in which great pecuniary advantages were offered to any gentleman capable of carrying on a correspondence in the French language. He had presented himself as an applicant for the position with the happiest results.

The time had come at last when he could honorably woo sweet Lucy Samuels with a reasonable hope of success. In fact, immediately after one success in life, we are apt to grow conceited and vainglorious, presumptuously concluding that because the wheel of fortune has given one revolution in our favor it will continue to whirl obedient to our wishes until all our little schemes and plans are comfortably adjusted.

M. Emile's exultant frame of mind was altogether the result of this popular fallacy. At last his toilette was accomplished, and, complacently sure of his own utter irresistibility, he turned towards Mrs. Staunton's long-neglected communication, muttering between his white, gleaming teeth, something about deliverance and escape from eternal torment. This is what Madame had to say:

"I have done all that one unsustained party could towards the fulfilment of a contract. Things are rapidly approaching a crisis. When dotards of eighty years find it necessary to cross the ocean in search of health, it is 'sauve qui pent.'

Nothing can come between a man and his wife. Fortune is still possible for you. Flight is your only alternative. I pity you. If it comes to flight without an opportunity to gratify your kind heart by bidding your friends farewell, remember that no man dare violate an oath sworn to upon a Bible clasped in the hands of the dead. She carried your vows straight into the Presence! You have seven days in which to mend matters."

From trembling, nervous hands the note fluttered down on the carpet, and there while the reader of it, livid

with terror, white with the agony of this great revulsion from the pinnacle of happy expectation to the deepest hell of despair, called down murderous curses upon the writer of it.

"Prompter! Temptress! Circe! Devil! I curse you. Lost, eternally lost! Condemned of all mankind! Scorned by Lucy!"

He stoops and recovers the fateful note. With the deliberation of despair he reads it once more.

"'Sauve qui pent.' Flight! One narrow door still open!"

With all the complacency gone from his handsome face—with all its vaingloriousness shrunk into abject fear—with cold and trembling hands, he fills a small travelling satchel with the merest necessities. Only once he pauses in his hurried task to fill himself a glass of wine, into which he pours some drops from a vial upon the mantel. "I need them. My nerves else will fail me. I must husband my strength." He feels braver, stronger, after the wine, and flings himself upon the lounge to deliberate.

A knock at his own bed-room door startles him into a sitting posture.

A husky "Come in" is answered by Paul Weyland's entrance.

"It is you! My friend! How can I say how glad"—he breaks his welcome abruptly off, and the bright look of relief which had overspread his face when Paul's tall form had answered his summons, fades quickly away, giving place to an ashen look of fear.

Sternly erect, disdaining the proffer of his one-time friend's extended hand, the Judge's son looks down upon him, as he sinks tremblingly upon the lounge once more, coldly, disdainfully, with a scornful disgust spreading over his own bright features.

"Control yourself sufficiently to answer half a dozen questions, Monsieur, which your tell-tale agitation have rendered almost superfluous. For your own sake I advise calmness."

"For your own sake!" There was a promise, a vague hint of a promise in the words, which reassured the volatile soul or the Frenchman, and helped him to that calmness which Paul demanded.

"Pardon!" he murmurs, clearing his throat nervously, to rid himself of the business which so impeded his utterance. "I have been much discomposed

today. My friend's face does not look kindly; he—"

"I am not here, M. Girardeau, as your friend. I am here simply to make some inquiries relative to a matter upon which I have been questioned recently. May I inquire how this letter of introduction came in your possession?" With which, the letter which had opened the Lodge doors and its chivalrous master's heart to the unknown foreigner, was thrown upon the table for his inspection.

No answer came to his questioning. Looking into the Frenchman's face, Paul beheld it suddenly convulsed with a spasm of mortal agony. Springing from his lounge the wretched man seized the vial from which he had rashly poured the drops which were to give him strength. In his excitement he had taken the wrong vial from the shelf.

"And this is the narrow door of escape!" he murmurs, heaving one despairing sigh. Then he returns to his lounge, strangely calm, pitifully resigned.

"I have waited very patiently for your answer, M. Girardeau. Are you ready with it?"

"Yes. What would you know? I was in pain. I shall be again presently. Be quick with your questions, or I may leave them unanswered. See," he adds, touching his filled satchel with his varnished boot, "I was making preparation for a journey when you came in. I shall start on my journey presently—a longer one than I had planned—mais n'importe."

"Perhaps not," mutters Paul under his mustache, thinking of two stalwart officers down stairs, ready to do his bidding, in case his friend up stairs refused to satisfy his curiosity.

"You obtained the entrance into my house and my friendship by means of that letter of introduction from my old college-mate, Mr. Brinslow. I wish to know how you came by that letter."

"Hold! You lawyers are tiresome. I suffer. My sufferings increase. Take out your note-book, and record quickly my last deposition. You are here in M. Brousseau's interests. Am I not right?"

"You are." Paul seats himself, note-book in hand.

"I am. I was the confidential clerk of M. Brousseau. He trusted me and I was worthy of

his trust. He despatched me to America with a twofold object. I was to escort your cousin's mother to her friends, and then make collection of some moneys due him by a New York firm. My room-mate on board ship was one Emile Girardeau, who was coming to this country to retrieve his fortunes. We grew intimate, then confidential. On board the vessel he made a firm friend of an invalided millionaire who persuaded him to change his plan of coming to this Southern country, and, instead, to attach himself to him as his Secretary. Before leaving the vessel he cleared his pocket of some superfluous papers, among them his now useless letter of introduction to you, which lay on the floor of my stateroom. A woman tempted me to the first vile act of my life. I was to collect the money due my master, but not to return to France with it. Instead, I was to come South with her and woo a beautiful and wealthy Southern girl. I listened. He who listens even to the devil is lost. The woman had plans of her own in which she succeeded. Mine have failed. I rushed to my stateroom, there to think over her devilish suggestions. That letter stared me in the face, helping her, making easier of performance her dark plan. I have nothing more to tell you. M. Brousseau's defaulting clerk is before you. Emile Girardeau is—Heaven only knows where. Tell my master for me that—"

"Wait!" Paul looks up sternly from his note-book. "Remember, it is a deposition, not a confession I am taking down."

"Pardon, my friend, it is a confession," says the foreigner with a strange wistful smile.

"I have but one question more to ask before handing you over to the proper authorities. You came with my aunt, Mrs. Staunton?"

"No more. I have told you all that concerns me, Henri Gustave Lempriere. What concerns another, that other a woman, must—" he is silent—once more spasms of pain contract his brow, and great drops stand out upon his pallid forehead.

"Henri Gustave Lempriere, it becomes my sad but imperative duty to hand you over to the proper authorities for commitment before the courts of the state for felony as a defaulter," says the young lawyer, addressing his prisoner in a voice of sorrowful sternness.

Henri Gustave Lempriere bows in silent acquiescence, and Paul leaves the room to summon his officers.

They came. But it is to find that

proper authorities have been forestalled by a higher authority, and the soul of the prisoner has been summoned into the high court of Heaven, there to plead guilty before the Supreme Judge of the nations.

Paul had left M. Brousseau at the Homestead, anxiously awaiting the result of his inquiries. But the "dotard," who had come across the ocean in search of health, as Mrs. Staunton had put it, was not the man to sit with idly-folded hands while others attended to his business for him. Miles Standish's neglected motto was his: "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself."

Quite a warm friendship had sprung up between him and Mr. Morgan during the latter's stay in Paris. Delphine Staunton and her interests had been a sort of bond between them. It had become to be quite a matter of course that portions (impersonal portions) of Della's diaries should be read out to her venerable guardian. The frequent mention of M. Emile Girardeau's name had at first attracted his curiosity, then excited his suspicions.

Believing Delphine's Frenchman, whom "some secret trouble was oppressing," and his own defaulting clerk to be the same man, he wrote to the wife of his friend, and asked her to aid him in a matter wherein the American detective force had proven powerless. "Would Mrs. Staunton give him any information she might be possessed of relative to the whereabouts of his once-trusted clerk, Henri Gustave Lempriere?"

And Mrs. Staunton, flinging the dotard's letter of inquiry into the fire with a contemptuous exclamation, had made prompt answer to the effect:

"That M. Brousseau must pardon her if she acknowledged that, owing to the extreme weakness of her body and mind, while his clerk was acting as her escort she had kept herself in utter seclusion, only seeing that young man when change of conveyance, or other necessary matters brought them together. After reaching New York he had neglected her shamefully, seeming to be altogether taken up with private affairs of his own; and, had it not been for the kindness of the New Yorkers with whom she had travelled, she would have been *badly perplexed* how to proceed on her *to her darling child*. The desertion

of your business interests," she concludes, "is only paralleled by his desertion of my own helpless self, in that big, strange city. I do not believe, if I were brought face to face with your M. Henri Gustave Lempriere, I should recognize him so absorbed was I in my own private anxieties."

Thus replying, Mrs. Staunton secured herself against all contingencies.

Not satisfied either with the American detective force, or Mrs. Staunton's ready reply, M. Brousseau informed Mr. Morgan of his intention to return with him to America to prosecute the search in person. And for the detection of his defaulting clerk Max was retained at a magnificent price in case of success.

Together, he, Mr. Morgan and Paul Weyland, had repaired to the Homestead on the Thursday evening which had proven so fateful in various ways to Delphine Staunton, Mr. Samuels, Henri Gustave Lempriere and Maxwell Morgan.

Paul had left for M. Girardeau's lodgings, and Max for the church, leaving M. Brousseau seated in the parlor, waiting for the down-coming of Mrs. Staunton, to whom he had sent up his card by Toney.

When Mr. Morgan, with his promised wife hanging upon his arm, returned to the house some hours later, they found him still alone.

Warmly and affectionately he greeted his ward, drawing her into his arms, and pressing a fatherly kiss upon her rosy cheeks.

"You have seen my mother?" Delphine asks, glancing about in vain for that lady.

"No, I am not so fortunate," M. Brousseau says, picking out his sparse collection of English words very deliberately. "Madame is malade. As for me, I despair. If Madame would but permit me one little moment in interview. So much hangs upon it. I must see her. I am ruined, else."

"Perhaps I can persuade her to receive you in her room. She is a great invalid. I will try."

"Mother," says Delphine, gently, for she is happy now, and she does not feel coldly or unkindly to even the meanest thing that walks. "Mother, M. Brousseau is below. He regrets your illness, but begs you will allow him an interview. He cannot remain longer than this even-

ing. He says unless you will allow him to ask you some questions he will be ruined. I do not know what it all means. It may be only his extravagant Frenchy way of putting things. But as he was dear father's friend, will you not put aside your own feelings for this once, and let me bring him up?"

Madame is lying upon her lounge. The room is so dark that Della cannot see how white and haggard her mother's features are. Her voice is shrill and excited, as she makes sudden reply:

"Girl, are you all banded together against me? I tell you I am ill. I cannot see your guardian. I will not see him. Go away from me. You want to put me in the madhouse again. Go, tell him I am ill."

Delphine turns away sadly to obey.

"Stop." Mother and daughter remain quite still for a painfully long moment. "Bring me my white Nubia. This poor face is racked with torture. There, wrap it about my brow. Closer, closer. Now let fall the curtains. The light maddens me when this cruel neuralgia seizes on me. Now listen. I sacrifice myself to your wishes. Go to your guardian. Tell him I am ill, I suffer; but if his interests are wavering upon my words he may come. He must promise not to stay long—not to ask for a second interview. As much as I wish to befriend one who was dear to your precious father, my own welfare demands that I shall be left in quietness and seclusion."

Delphine leaves the room to repeat her words to M. Brousseau.

Closer, still closer about her aching face the sufferer draws the soft woolen cloud, until nothing but her lustrous eyes are visible.

"Sauve qui pent," she murmurs, sighing wearily as she turns her face towards the darkest side of the room.

And presently Delphine enters, accompanied by M. Brousseau and Maxwell Morgan.

"I must go with you," Max had said very firmly, with a strange light coming into his face. "If I am to be your lawyer, I must take this lady's deposition in person."

M. Brousseau stumbles forward, pioneered through the darkness by Delphine, until she sees him safely seated in a chair close by the sufferer's lounge; then she walks away to the window,

where Max has placed himself to wait until he is needed.

M. Brousseau clasps the little bird-claw extended to him in greeting, with friendly fervor, pouring out volubly, through the happy medium of his own native tongue, his regrets at her continued ill health.

The sufferer murmurs plaintive responses. Then the "dotard" begins a rigid catechism which shows him in full possession of his business wits at any rate. Madame's replies come promptly and unhesitatingly. The man of business suspects that the man of law may think of some interrogatory which has not suggested itself to him. He raises his voice and calls: "Monsieur Max!"

Max has never learned to write in the dark. Unmindful of the suffering God's bright sunlight will cause, with a quick agolpgy he flings wide the shutters and lets it stream upon the lounge, towards which he walks firmly, quickly, boldly, with that strange look of expectancy in his eyes.

"Maxwell Morgan here! Traitor!" she rises upon her lounge in tigerish wrath, her glistening eyes fastened upon Della's pale face. The woollen cloud falls away from her own face. M. Brousseau looks upon the revealed features in bewilderment—looks again, and finds voice at last:

"This is not William Staunton's wife!"

Then Maxwell Morgan takes the whole matter into his own hands.

"I knew it! I knew," he says, with merciless severity, looking the woman with untrustworthy eyes sternly in the face. "I knew that this woman could not be Delphine Staunton's mother. To tell me who you are, and the manner and motive of this imposture, is all that remains to you."

"And then," she says, glaring upon the group like a hunted thing at bay, "what shall my sentence be?"

"To the tender mercies of her whom alone you have injured, shall that be left," Mr. Morgan makes answer, drawing Della's trembling form within his supporting arm.

"Delphine, then, to you I make confession. I am the cousin who took true and tender care of your unfortunate mother. That is all the claim I have upon your mercy. That mother died on ship-board. In her last moment she placed her woe-

ring, your father's picture, and her marriage certificate together with other papers in my possession, asking me to bring them on to her daughter. The devil whispered me how easy it would be to personate that mother, and secure to myself a position which would never be accorded me otherwise. We buried her at sea with her Bible clasped in her hands. On that Bible my bought tool and accomplice, Henri Gustave Lempriere, swore that no earthly power should ever make him reveal the fact of Celestine Staunton's death. The reward for his constancy was to be your hand and ultimately your fortune. My plans were well laid, and they would have sufficed for my life-long ease had it not been for you, Maxwell Morgan—you who distrusted me from the first—you who have detected me at last! Now, do your worst." With sullen despair she turned her glittering eyes upon Delphine once more, and silence reigned supreme until a voice as soft and gentle as the voice of an angel sent to bring tidings of great peace to erring man, said:

"You were kind and good once to my mother. For her sake, her daughter says, go in peace!"

CONCLUSION.

With the coming day came Father Richards, and he took away from the Homestead a broken-spirited, weary woman. She had played a game of hazard, and had lost. Sullen resentment against Maxwell Morgan, and a shame-faced disinclination to look into Della's brave eyes was all the noticeable change about her at first, but when Paul Weyland brought to the Homestead the pitiful story of Henri Lempriere's death, an agony of remorse seized upon her, and, when the holy man came to take Delphine with him to the peaceful seclusion of the convent, the wretched woman besought his intercession with offended Heaven and asked only that her days might be prolonged until she had won pardon for the ruin of that unhappy man.

It was not until after the departure of her priestly uncle and the subsidence of the tumultuous excitement incident to the strange revelation that left her motherless, that Delphine

came sufficiently out of herself to ask:

"Has Mr. Samuels been here, Max? You know he is still waiting for his answer, and I dread it."

"It is the one matter in which I cannot aid my darling. See, he is coming back with Paul. I will leave you until you have told him."

"No!" and she grasps his arm convulsively. "Stay with me, Max. He is so gentle, so good, it is such keen pain to inflict a disappointment upon him. He who has asked so little of a world to which he has given so much."

"I think he asked for a great deal when he asked for my Della's hand."

"Yes, but—" They were pacing the terrace, and, turning, found it was too late for Max to leave, or for Delphine to finish her sentence.

Mr. Samuels was close to them. Paul had disappeared down a side walk. The pastor held out a hand to each of them, and his holy eyes rested on them as calmly, as beneficently as if no happy dream of ever making this beautiful girl his wife had ever disturbed the quiet tenor of his life.

"May I not add my voice to others which have already bidden you God-speed upon your new path in life? You have found what you wanted, Delphine, and the love and kindness which have come into your life will never fail you, I am sure. You, Mr. Morgan have come Heaven-guided. Paul has told me how near we came to losing her. To you I can resign her with a smile—to a convent with a sigh. Cherish her as I should have done had it been permitted me, and, 'she shall do you good and not evil all the days of her life.'"

Then he went away from them, leaving Della's bright eyes shining through unshed tears, and Max filled with reverent admiration for his manliness and his bravery.

The next time they saw him was in the little church, when he stood before them in his robes of office to join together in the sight of God and man Paul Weyland and fair-haired Lucy Samuels, Maxwell Morgan and Delphine Staunton.

No mortal eye could have detected anything more than the solemn emotion attendant upon the giving away a cherished member of his own household, in the pastor's serene face and gentle,

low-toned voice. But he who seeth in secret knew that the cup tasted very bitter, even to the lips of his faithful servant, who put away from him on that day the first and last dream of a wife-blessed home, a helper in the good work, and bowing his head submissively under a heavy yoke, said: "Not mine, but Thy will, oh Lord!"

And at last Sergeant Danbury is happy. For the little lady is happy. When the old Homestead was filled from garret to ground floor with the friends who came about her in her great joy, the Judge and Aunt Catharine, Eleanor and Evelyn, and M. Brousseau, and Paul with his bride, the old Sergeant was in his element. The resources that he and Mother Danbury developed were marvellous, or perhaps it was because smiling content sat with them at the board, and wandered at her own sweet will among the guests that everything seemed so bright and pleasant and altogether satisfactory.

M. Brousseau remained in this country just long enough to discover that the heart is never too old to love, and made Eleanor an offer, which would have been ridiculous but for its earnest sincerity.

"I am not young, but then no man is past making a woman happy at fifty. I adore you. Marry me, and all that wealth can do to aid affection shall be done to perfect your happiness."

Her calm eyes never left his face while he was speaking. She did not smile, for he was in manly earnest. She did not blush, for she was a wise, clear-brained woman. She simply returned him a kind but positive "No," not deeming it necessary to tell him that she, like the gentle pastor who had met his fate at Della's hands, recognized but one true, absorbing, deathless love as possible.

But one cloud has darkened the sunlight that has beamed steadily about the Homestead ever since Max's home-coming. That one cloud was so soft and and white and fleeting that it was gone ere its presence as a cloud was well recognized.

It was the painless, peaceful death of Mother Danbury, who went before to show them how a Christian could die. When her summons came they were all gathered about her—all that she loved on earth. There was a radiance about the withered face that robbed Death of its terrors, and Della gazed down upon it with a strange fascination.

The last moments were given to good and wise counsel—counsel dignified by the Awful Presence above the narrow details that had filled the poor, untaught precisionist's days too full. But the hour of her triumph had come, and she looked the Angel of Death bravely, fearlessly in the face.

"Mother," says the Sergeant, bringing his tall figure down close to the poor form lying there helpless and worn, "is there any help you ask? Any one you would wish to come and make the road clearer for you? The minister, perhaps."

She turns her sightless eyes upward—not to Dan—far away, above him—but her words are for him—strong, brave words that comfort him when she is gone.

"No, I need no one, son. I am not afraid. I am quite sure of my welcome." Then clearly, sweetly, comes her last earthly utterance:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
Oh, Lamb of God, I come."

THE END.

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